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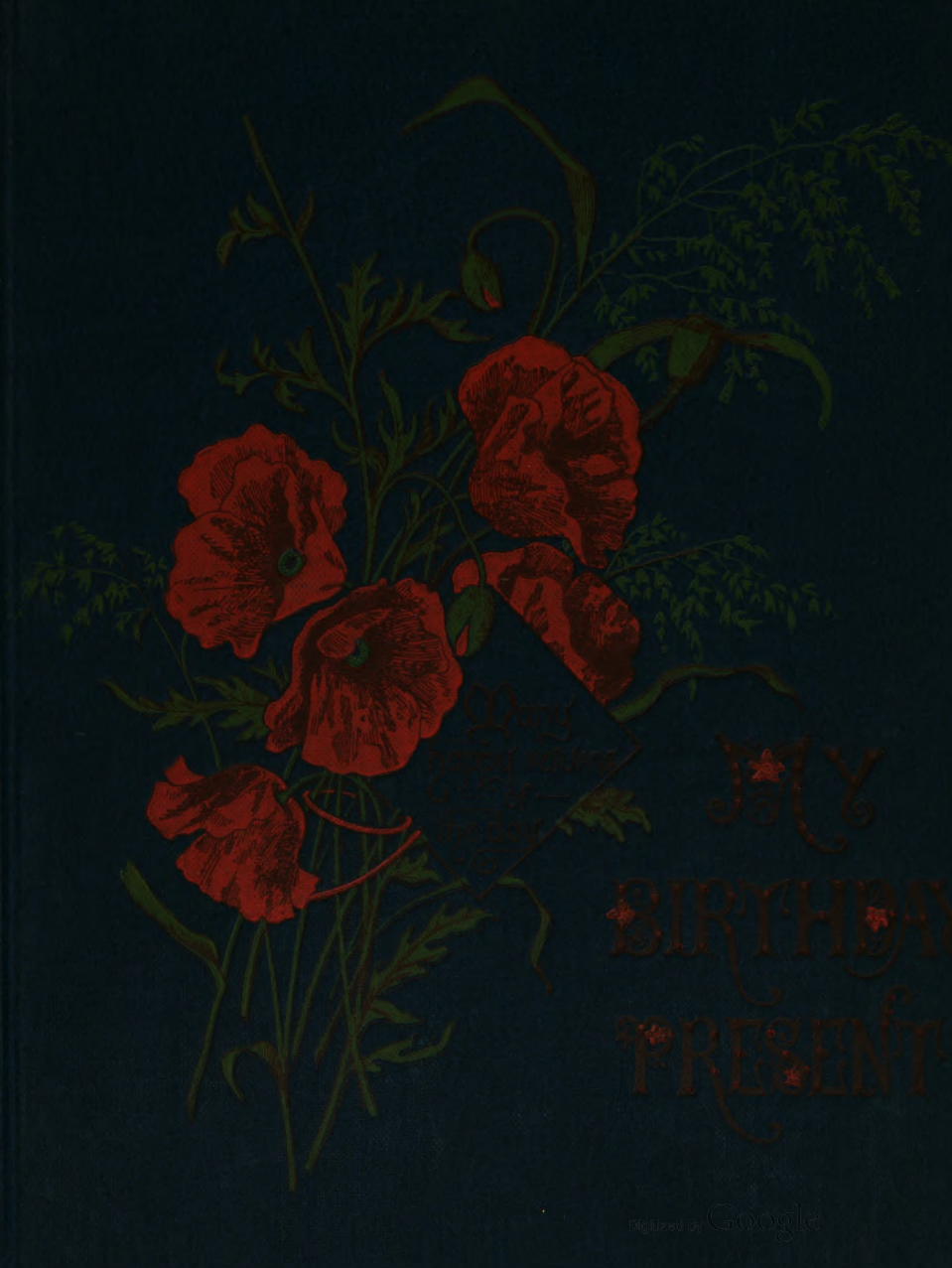

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MY BIRTHDAY PRESENT.

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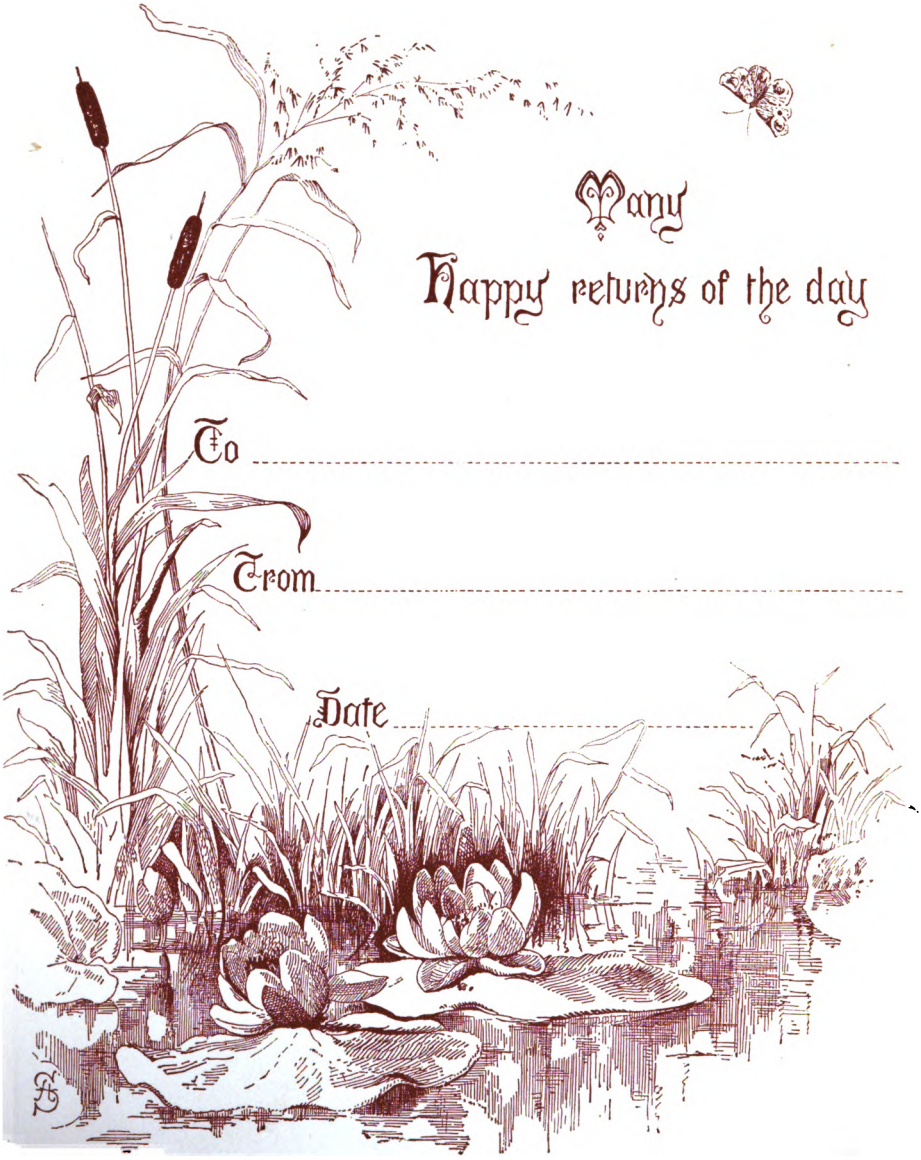

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My Birthday Present.

A SERIES OF ORIGINAL BIRTHDAY STORIES FOR BOYS AND GIRLS FROM SIX TO TWELVE YEARS OF AGE.

BY

S. BARING-GOULD
CAROLINE BIRLEY.
HELEN WILMOT-BUXTON.
ETHEL M. WILMOT-BUXTON.
FRANCES CHARLTON.
FRANCES CLARE.

London:
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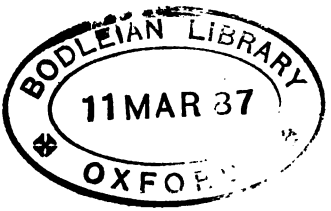

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My Prague Pig.

BY THE REV. S. BARING-GOULD.

ONE of my earliest recollections is connected with a Pig. In fact, one chamber of memory has been with me—a Pig-stye! You may think this is not something to boast about—it is something rather to cover up and ignore; but that pig has had such an elevating, stimulating effect on me from my earliest days—I mean from my earliest days of intelligence—that I am proud to acknowledge my indebtedness to pig.

I have read a story of a poor little beggar-boy, brought up among gipsies, who, when he thought over his first years, dimly recollected a beautiful lady and a stately house; and this early recollection led ultimately to his being recognized and re-instated in his rights as heir to a great nobleman with princely possessions. I do not

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remember any beautiful lady, but I do remember a—Pig! And I do not recall any gorgeous chambers, but I do recollect a little shelf in the nursery on which stood my pig! I have heard persons say that they can recall the sweet songs sung to them when they were babies, lulling them to sleep when fractious and cutting teeth. I cannot; but I distinctly remember the rattle in the inside of my pig, and that sound was to me the sweetest of sounds!

Rattle in the inside of my pig! What do I mean? Listen, and you shall hear.

There are various breeds of pig. The Irish pig is a big-boned, ill-formed brute, with large hanging ears, and strong bristly hair. I don't approve of it. My pig was not at all like it—it had no bones and no hair!

The Rudgewick breed is the largest of English breeds, and was for ages reared on the borders of Surrey and Sussex, and has attained such an enormous size that it has reached the weight of an ox! Mine was not a Rudgewick pig—it was very small.

The Hampshire hog has long borne a good name for making superior bacon — but mine produced no bacon at all!

The Chinese pig is white or black, and fattens on a comparatively small quantity of food. Mine was not a Chinese pig—it was neither white nor black, and it consumed a great deal!

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But I need not go through all the sorts of pigs to show you what my pig was *not*. I must tell you what he *was*. He was a Prague pig. He was bought in the market-place at Prague by my father for the sum of five kreuzers, that is, I believe, one penny. My father, having bought him, wrapped him up in a stocking and brought him home thus. He ate—I mean the pig, not my father—nothing all the time my father was travelling, and when he reached home—I mean, not the pig's home, but mine—he was perfectly empty. My father arrived on my birthday. He had been travelling, for his holiday of six weeks, in Bohemia.

When he came my mother saluted him with, "Well, dear, to-day is John Thomas's birthday—*what have you bought him?*"

"Bless me!" exclaimed my father, "I had forgotten. There is nothing, absolutely nothing—but the pig."

"Pig!" said my mother, "What pig?"

"You shall see, and judge if that will do," said my father. "The pig is wrapped up in my stocking."

"Oh, Edward!" exclaimed my mother.

"I brought it from Prague," exclaimed my father; "it is of the genuine Czeck breed."

"I beg your pardon, I do not understand," said my mother.

"The Bohemians," said my father, "do not call themselves Bohemians, but Czecks; and as this pig is special

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to Bohemia, I call it a Czeck pig, or, if you find a difficulty in pronouncing the name, split the difference and call it a Prague Pig."

Then my mother, rather gingerly, began to examine my father's portmanteau, and cautiously to unfold his stockings, expecting every moment to hear a "wee! wee! wee!" and see a little pig, or, perhaps, a guinea-pig, run out.

When she came to it, it was indeed a wee-pig; she held it up and said, "Oh, Edward, what is it for?"

"It is a money box," answered my father. "Do you not see it has a slit down its back, through which coins can be dropped into it."

"But, Edward, you can't get them out again without breaking the pig to pieces."

"That is the beauty of the pig," said my father.

Now the pig was of common pottery, with little ears, snout, eyes, and the loveliest curly tail conceivable. It had a slit along its back, and a vast void stomach. Through the slit coins were let drop, and they fell into the stomach of the pig. The pig was mottled yellow and brown, a sort of creamy yellow, and the brown like chestnut.

My mother turned the pig about, meditatively, and said, "What did you give for this thing?"

"About a penny," answered my father.

"But, my dear Edward," she said, "you really cannot

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think of giving our sweet boy" (she meant me), "that dear, placid, angel-faced intellectual John Thomas, a birthday present that cost only a penny, and brought from Bohemia, too?"

"Why not? He is too young to know that it cost such a trifle."

"But—he will grow, Edward," said my mother. "He will grow tremendously; his intellect will expand, his thoughts deepen, his mind soar—and what will he think in after ages of his papa, who only gave him a penny pig, after he had been all the way to Bohemia. If—if—you had bought him a sixpenny packet of butter scotch, or a shilling box of vanilla chocolate, *chocolat menier* (chocolate manure, as the dear, clever little cherub calls it), why, it would not seem so mean. The sweets would be consumed in infancy, and he might forget how small was the present; but the pig, Edward, is a permanency, standing ever before his eyes. Just consider, Edward, in five-and-twenty years time, perhaps, our John Thomas may bring a lovely blushing bride home, and, who knows, you may be lying mouldering in the grave then; well, how would you like his wife to ask him what that extraordinary pig was, and to have him answer, 'My papa gave it me on my birthday; it cost him one penny.' I believe your mouldering remains would blush in the hollow tomb, were this thing to occur. *No*, Edward, emphatically *no*.

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If you give John Thomas that pig, you shall put half-a-sovereign into it."

For peace, and to regain his wife's esteem, and ensure mine in after ages, my dear father did drop half-a-sovereign into the pig. Then my mother said to him, "Edward, what do you like best for dinner. You shall have it."

Now, perhaps you can understand how that pig impressed itself on my mind. It did more than stamp itself on my mind, it moulded and governed my future life. I will tell you now how that came to pass.

At the time when the Czeck, or Prague Pig, was brought to England by my father, and given to me, on my birthday, I was so young that I remember nothing that went before it, and I only remember that day through the pig. The pig was brought to me and shown me. I was made to kiss his little snout, and admire his flap ears, and exclaim over his curly tail. But, above all, my mother and my nurse entreated me to remark how his insides rattled, and to urge on me that the pig had golden insides, even a half-sovereign.

I remember how my mother shook the pig near my ear, and put on an awestruck expression, and said "Gold, baby! Wee-wee-wee has gold in his insides. Only think! You would not suppose it by looking at his face, but he has. Yes, dear baby, precious John Thomas, he has gold in him."

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I remember how that one day I had some liquorice given me, because I had a cough, and, as my nurse rather pampered me, I was allowed to play with my Czeck Pig. I was in a peevish mood, or an inconsiderate mood. I do not know exactly what my motives were. I may have argued with myself—If the pig has gold in his inside, why not liquorice! So I broke off little bits of liquorice, and shoved them in through the slit in the back of the pig.

When my dear father and mother heard what I had done, they were grieved, and they took the pig and put him in the hot bath, and then the water melted the liquorice, and it began to leak away, rising in the water out of his back in a black stream. Then I began to scream, for I thought: if liquorice melts, why not gold? and I feared the gold would dissolve and be washed out of the pig.

Then my father took me on his knee, and he said to me, "John Thomas, that pig had gold in him, and you put in bits of liquorice, little sweet, black bits, and the pig would be quite unfitted for his purpose in life, unless these bits of liquorice were got out of him. So I have been obliged to put the pig in the hot bath and dissolve the liquorice. The gold, however, is not soluble. Soluble is a word you do not understand now, but you will in after life. Now, my dear little man, you have excellent qualities in you, like gold. Take care not to put in black,

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sweet, little bits of vice. That is my first lesson. And, secondly, if you get them in you, don't delay till you have melted them out of you again. Whilst in the pig the liquorice stuck to the gold, begrimed it, and prevented it from clinking about in the inside of the pig. So, my dear, vice in you will mar and cause no longer to be observed those good qualities which are in you."

After that, whenever I was naughty, my father or my mother would shake me, and pretend to listen, and say, "No, John Thomas, I can't hear the clinking of the gold. We must get rid of the black and nasty temper that clogs and arrests it."

One day my father curled up my lip, and peered into my mouth, and said gravely, "One of his little tootsies is going to decay, he must not be given so many sweeties. So he thought a while, and then he said, "John Thomas, suppose you give up sugar? It will save you much pain, and I will let you have half-a-crown per annum if you will do without sugar in your tea. That half-crown can go into the pig, where in after times it will profit you, whereas, in the shape of sugar now it will injure you. The saccharine matter—you do not understand the word now, but you will one day, when you have grown a beard and moustache and whiskers—the saccharine matter turns acid on your blessed little stomach, and corrodes your molars."

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"My dear Edward," said my mother, looking earnestly into my father's face, "What can our sweet pet understand by the expression 'corrode your molars?'"

"Never mind," answered my father. He paused, and his lips quivered, and he said, with his finger raised in admonition, "Beware, my angel boy, of corroding your molars."

I was so frightened with the prospect that I screamed out, "Let the pig have it! let the pig have it!"

For a twelvemonth I did without sugar in my tea. Many a time I longed for it, and that nurse of mine was inclined to give it me, but I resisted the temptation. Whenever I raised my eyes to the shelf where stood my Prague Pig, it seemed to me that there was a piteous pleading expression on his earthenware countenance, that seemed to say, "If you hold out against sugar for twelve months, you will give me a half-crown for my insides, and then, O joy! O joy! won't they rattle."

When the year was over, consisting of twelve months, three hundred and sixty-five days, or of one thousand and ninety-five meals, I had the proud satisfaction of dropping half-a-crown into the stomach of the pig.

"And now, my John Thomas, said my father, "see what the piggy-wig has taught you—to keep a check on your carnal appetites. Carnal is a word a little beyond you now, but you will arrive at it in time. Now, how about sugar for the ensuing year?"

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"I like tea best without it," said I.

"Splendid!" exclaimed my father. "So is it in life. We think we can't do without all sorts of sweet, but injurious things, but let us only try, and we shall find that we can; our powers of self-control are strengthened, and at last we discover that it is pleasanter to us to be without that which is sweet, but noxious. Noxious," continued my father, "is a word"—

"Never mind about noxious," interrupted my mother, "let him digest what you have already given him."

One day I was in a furious temper. I kicked my nurse, I pulled the under-housemaid's nose, when she came to ask what the noise was about. I was put into a room by myself, and I tore down the wall paper as far as I could reach, and kicked the paint off the doors.

My mother was summoned, and she put her gentle face in through the door, and asked if I would be good. I shrieked and stormed worse than ever, and said I would not. Then she went after my father, and entreated him to come to me. "But," she besought, "don't smack him."

My father came up. He did not go directly to the room where I was, but to the nursery, where he took up the pig, and, shaking it, came to me. I was on the floor howling. He seated himself on a chair, and shook the pig, so that his gold and silver insides jingled. I looked

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up, and hushed my howls. Then my father took the poker, and made as though he would break the pig.

I uttered a piercing yell, and fell on my knees, and raised my hands and streaming eyes to him.

"John Thomas," said my father, "the painter and the paperhanger will send in a bill for twelve-and-six for the damage done to this room. *You* have done it, so *you* must pay for it. Your only revenue is in the pig. Revenue is a word you cannot comprehend now, but I shall speedily make its significance obvious to you. I smash the pig to get at your twelve-and-six."

I cried, I pleaded, I promised amendment.

"Then," said my father, "I will spare the pig on one condition—that you allow me to lay you across my knee. I observe on yonder dressing-table a flat round hair-brush. If you will allow me to chastise you so that you will feel it acutely—acutely, by the way, is a word you will see the force of presently—then I will spare the pig!"

"Whip me, papa, but do not hurt my pig!" I said.

Then I was whipped—with the back of the hair-brush. After that my father said, "You have learned a lesson, John Thomas, from the pig; that when you do wrong you suffer for it. Also, not to shove (that is a word you *do* understand) the punishment on another. You took your chastisement manfully, instead of allowing the pig to be broken."

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My father was warm. He took his pocket-handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his brow. Then he went on, "My dear boy, look at that pig. Observe the imperturbability—imperturbability may be a long word, but it is eminently expressive—the imperturbability of that pig's face. He is never angry, he never gets red in the cheeks. He never sparkles at the eyes. He bears everything with a sweetness and placidity of temper that cannot be too highly admired. Emulate the pig."

After that, whenever I felt angry, and evil passions arose in my heart, I looked at my pig and controlled them, and I thought if I do wrong I shall have to suffer for it.

When my uncles and aunts visited our home they very generally gave me money presents, and I always put the money into the body of my pig. It was a pleasure to me to do this; to feel, after each visit of uncle or aunt, that my pig was weighing heavier. My dear mother humoured me by weighing my pig for me, and just as my height as I grew was registered against the side of the door in the library, so was the weight of my pig written up at intervals. He has gained half-an-ounce—he weighs an ounce eight grains more than he did this time last year. O, joy!

One day a terrible temptation came on me; I wanted to buy a cannon and real powder, but I had not the money. It was all in the pig. Should I break my pig and get the money out for the cannon?

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As I considered, my father came up, and he said to me, "John Thomas, feel him, how heavy he is. After another visit or two from a relative he will be chuck-full. Chuck-full is not a dictionary word, and I scruple to use it, but I have stooped to the level of your comprehension. Wait till he is chuck-full."

I saw the far-reaching wisdom of my father, and submitted.

"By this," said he, "you learn never to anticipate. Always wait for the right moment when to act."

But when my pig was so full of money that he could not hold even a threepenny-piece, then the desire to have a cannon had gone from me, and a soaring ambition had taken hold of me to possess a real, live sow. Should I break my pig to extract his precious vitals and therewith purchase a sow?

"Now," said my father, "the time has come when the inanimate pig may be abolished, and in its place may be substituted one invested with the prerogative of existence. Prerogative," said my father, "is a word derived from the Latin, from 'præ' and 'rogare,' as you may know now that you have begun to learn the Classic tongues."

So—I sprung a surprise on my venerable father.

"Papa," said I, "I have foreseen this eventuality (which comes from *e* and venire), and I have acquired the German vernacular as well as the Classic Latin, in order that I may

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be able to write a German letter to Prague to order the transmission to me of another pig of earthenware, not for my own use, but as a memorial of the invaluable instructions I have received from the Czeck pig, which has taught me nearly every virtue which makes a man esteemed and happy."

I must tell you now about that living sow I bought with the contents of my earthenware pig. It was a very profitable sow to me, especially as her feeding cost me nothing. She lived on the scrapings and waste from the kitchen, and from the garden refuse. She had a litter of twelve, and I reared all; those that were sows, that is ten of them, I retained, the boar pigs I fattened and sold to my parents at 6½d. per pound, and as they weighed together 54 lbs. I realized by those two pigs £1 9s. 3d. The sows I kept; with their mother they numbered eleven, and next year each had a litter of twelve, and each had two boar pigs, which I fattened and earned by them £16 1s. 9d. Then I had a herd of one hundred and ten; but that was leap year, in which each sow farrowed three boar pigs instead of two, bringing me in £241 6s. 3d. The same thing repeated itself next year, only, that not being leap year each sow littered only two boar pigs instead of three.

Twenty-three years have elapsed, and the sows have been multiplying ever since, in exactly the same proportion, and now—here is a sum for you to do. What is my

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present income? Also, How many sows have I got in my styes? What will be my fortune in fifteen years time? In leap years, remember, my sows farrow three little boar pigs instead of two. You must make allowances for that. I have now a handsome house, a lovely conservatory, pine-apples, vines, roses, apricots, tomatoes, also an engaging wife, and three little children; and I look upon my Prague Pig as my benefactor in having conferred all these things upon me, for my father left me no independent income. He need not blush in his hollow tomb at having given me the Prague Pig.

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Getting Out of Bed the Wrong Way.

BY FRANCES CHARLTON.

NURSE said that Master Harry had got out of bed the wrong side that morning. Harry did not quite see how that could be, because, as his bed was placed against the wall, there was only one side at which he *could* get out. But he knew that the remark was meant to be uncomplimentary, and it did not by any means restore his good humour, which he had managed to lose very early in the day, and had not yet succeeded in finding.

Well, certainly, things had gone very wrong. He had been promised a birthday picnic to Epping Forest, and although the day was fine, the first thing Harry heard was that the horse had chosen, as Harry said, to be lame,

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and so they would have to put up with taking their dinners to Hampstead Heath.

In those days there were no notice boards warning people off the Heath, and it was altogether a much more rural and delightful place than it is now; but Harry knew it so well that he thought nothing of it.

"It's a stupid place," he muttered, kicking as he spoke at the water-jug.

"Take care, Master Harry; you'll be breaking that directly. There, I told you so," as the jug was upset, and, striking against the baby's bath, was broken to pieces, spilling the water, and giving Nurse just cause of complaint.

Nurse's patience was sorely tried that morning. Never before had so much soap got into Harry's eyes, or so many tangles been found in his hair, and Nurse was very glad when he was at last ready to go down to prayers.

"And I do hope, Master Harry, as that, or your breakfast, or something, will put you in a better temper for the rest of the day."

Harry found his porridge smoky and lumpy, although his brothers and sisters, and his cousins, Jack and Lucy, who were staying with them, said that theirs was very nice indeed.

"Why, what's the matter with Harry?" asked his father. "You haven't at all a birthday face! Have you got out of bed the wrong way?"

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"That's just what Nurse said; as if I could help being disappointed at having to go to a stupid place like Hampstead Heath."

"Stupid place? It's a very nice place. I only wish I had the chance of taking a holiday and going to the Heath this lovely day." Then, seeing that the discontented look on Harry's face did not disappear, his father said, more gravely, "We are all very sorry you cannot have your promised treat, my boy; but as it is no one's fault, you must make the best of it, and then I am sure you will have a very happy time. You can all have a donkey steeple-chase, and I will give the winner a new book."

"Oh, father; oh, uncle, that will be splendid!" cried half-a-dozen voices at once, and although Harry's was not one of them, his face certainly relaxed under the influence of his father's pleasant speech—to say nothing of the despised breakfast, which had, nevertheless, been consumed with considerable rapidity.

"Remember, Harry," said his father, as he went out of the room, "Turpin's lameness is a much greater annoyance and inconvenience to me than it can possibly be to you. Cheer up, and try to enjoy yourself."

There was an interval to be got through between breakfast and the start, during which the children were to play in the large garden.

For a time things went smoothly, but when Nurse took

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baby indoors, and Mrs. Mansfield was packing the hampers, Harry proposed that they should all climb on to the wall which divided their house (a semi-detached one) from the next.

"Oh, Harry," said his sister Jennie, "You know quite well that mother said we were never to go there again, because it's so dangerous, and besides, we have to climb over the hen-house, and it isn't nice at all."

"I don't care," said Harry; "surely, I can do *something* I like on my birthday? You come along, Jack, never mind Jennie; she's always going on like that! I bought a pea-shooter yesterday, and we can have a shy at the things going along"

This was decidedly a tempting proposal to Jack, who had not been at his uncle's long enough to know much of the rules of the house.

"Who'll come? You will, Jack, and George, and I, and we'll have Lucy. She's not such a duffer as most girls" (doubtless this was because Lucy was rather a tomboy), "and Jennie can look after Maud."

"I don't vant to come wiz du, du's a naughty boy, Ally," said little Maud, as she trotted off quite contentedly with her sister.

Jennie thought she ought to go and tell her mother what the others were doing, especially as pea-shooters were absolutely forbidden, but she did not think the children

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could come to much harm or do much, for the peas had never been shot far enough to hit anyone, and she felt sorry for Harry's disappointment, and thought, perhaps, he would be happier after being allowed a little of his own way. So she played with Maud until it was time for them all to go.

When Mrs. Mansfield's voice was heard, calling, "Now, children, it is time to start," there was a great rush of the party from the parapet. Jack prided himself a good deal on his gymnastic talents, and after swinging himself down very neatly, was prepared to help the others, if necessary. Lucy and George reached the ground safely, and then came Harry's turn. He, too, prided himself not a little on his gymnastic talents, but with not quite such good reason as his cousin. Whether he was clumsy, or whether the wire had been weakened by the unusual strain of so many pairs of feet, it is impossible to say. Whatever the cause, one thing was certain, namely, that just as Harry took the last step on the wooden rail of the hen-house, the wire fastened to it gave way, and unlucky Harry fell plump down amongst the hens! Such a commotion, such clacking, and screaming, and flapping of feathers was surely never heard before. Nor had there ever been occasion for such loudly-expressed resentment, for never, no, not even in the memory of the oldest inhabitant of the poultry-house had their domain been

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intruded on by anyone in that unceremonious fashion. Everybody, Harry included, who came in to collect their eggs, had always, hitherto, entered through the wire door, walking upon two legs in a manner to which the hens were perfectly accustomed, and, indeed, taking themselves to be "the glass of fashion and the mould of form," they considered this the only proper and dignified mode of proceeding. Now, therefore, that a great dark creature came suddenly flopping down amongst them, their surprise and indignation knew no bounds.

As to Harry, I cannot tell you what his feelings were at that moment, for he was never known to speak of them.

Certainly, the ground was soft—too soft in fact—and the poor boy presented a truly pitiable spectacle when he arose covered with mud and feathers. As to the on-lookers, as soon as they found that Harry was not hurt they burst into fits of laughter, Jack, especially, rolled on the lawn and laughed till he cried. Only sister Jennie, the girl whom Harry thought such a duffer, was serious and sorry enough about him to run to her mother for help, and then run back to poor Harry. The other children were very good-natured, and did not tease their unfortunate companion, but for many days afterwards any allusion to the event was sufficient to send Jack from the room with a hasty apology to his aunt, and generally with his pocket-

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handkerchief crammed into his mouth to prevent himself from laughing out loud.

There were no eggs for breakfast for many mornings after that, and if Harry went to the stable, and was troublesome, Wilkins only had to ask him, with a broad grin, if he recollected being rubbed down with a wisp of straw "that" day, to reduce Harry to instant submission.

Of course it was some time before Harry was ready again, and the party were able to start.

By the time they reached the Heath it was their dinner hour, and they quickly found a quiet spot in which to sit down and enjoy the nice things Mrs. Mansfield had provided for them.

After dinner they played games, and then thought it was time to have the donkey steeple-chase. So they went to the place where the donkeys stood, and chose their donkeys. Harry had been very quiet, and the others had left him alone, thinking he would recover himself better so, and with the same kind feeling they allowed him to have the first choice of a donkey. He chose a large and very pretty donkey, and then the others in turn made their choice, Jack coming last, and taking the smallest and slowest-looking animal there, because, he said, it was only fair to give the girls a chance.

As they were getting ready to start, a ragged boy, who did not appear to have anything to do with the donkeys,

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came up to Harry, and said, "That 'ere's a queer-tempered moke, master; his name's the 'Dook o' Wellington.' You'll have to be careful with him, but I can tell you how to make him go. I knows him, and when he do start there ain't a better goer in the kingdom."

"You be off," said Harry, gruffly, "we don't want you bothering about here."

The boy whistled and lounged away, and the children prepared to start.

All the donkeys trotted off very well except the "Duke of Wellington," and he kicked and tried to throw Harry off, and altogether refused to move in the direction he was wanted to. "Come back, all of you," shouted Harry, "it isn't a fair start; my donkey won't go." Back they all came, and waited patiently while they tried by every means they could think of to induce the "Duke" to bestir himself. At last he did go a few steps, and then showed dangerous symptoms of lying down in the road. This was worse than all! What was to be done? There were no other donkeys on that part of the Heath, and it would have been quite useless for any of the girls to attempt to ride such an obstinate creature.

"Let me try," said Jack, "I've ridden cantankerous ponies before now, and I ought to be able to manage a donkey."

In his heart Harry thought this very kind of his cousin,

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but he had not yet grown amiable enough to say so; he shrugged his shoulders, and said, "All right, you can try if you like."

While the cousins exchanged steeds, the gipsy boy came forward to hold the "Duke's" bridle, and, in a low voice, made to Jack the same observations he had previously made to Harry.

"Can you though?" said Jack. "Well, just tell me how to make him go, and I'll give you twopence, that's all the money I have at present."

"Well, you just sit behind the saddle—don't put your feet in the stirrips—take off your hat and rattle your stick inside it, and sing out 'Long live the "Dook o' Wellington,"' and he'll go better than any donkey on the Heath."

"Harry." "Well." "This boy says he can make your donkey go. May I do what I like to win?"

"Oh, yes, do what you can," replied Harry, almost laughing, "I don't think you've much chance."

"Good-bye, Jack," said Lucy, "I suppose we shall see you when we come back?"

Off they went, followed by the donkey boys. Jack tried the ordinary way of riding, with no better success than Harry had done, and then he took the gipsy's advice, with the astonishing result that "The Dook" set off at such a fast gallop that he soon caught up the others. Here he showed signs of slackening his pace, but Jack gave

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another loud rattle of his stick in his hat and another shout of "Long live the Dook o' Wellington," and off he went again, arriving at Jack Straw's Castle in such good time that when the others reached the goal Jack was standing beside "The Dook," hat in hand, and received them with a low bow.

"You certainly chose the right donkey, Harry, if you'd only known how to ride him."

"Well, Jack, you did deserve to win. How did you manage to stick on?"

"I should never have done it if that boy had not told me how. I must give him his twopence."

Harry thought it would have been to his advantage if he had not been quite so rough and rude even to a ragged gipsy boy, and by the time they reached home he had come to the conclusion that it was a pity to be disagreeable any longer, so that he was quite pleased when his father gave the book to Jack, and the rest of the evening was spent very happily by everyone.

"Well, Master Harry," said Nurse, as she was putting him to bed, "It's to be hoped that another birthday you'll manage to get out of bed the right way."

"I mean to," said Harry.

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Katie and the Alligator,

Or, a Birthday in Florida.

BY FRANCES CLARE.

IT was that hour between the day and the darkness which the Scotch call the "gloaming," and a very happy, but rather tired, company of children had gathered around the library fire, and were trying to amuse each other by telling stories, for it was Violet Burnley's tenth birthday, and the little band of birthday guests, whom she had invited to keep it with her, were tired of everything. They were tired of play, tired of pleasure, and *almost*, but not quite, tired of looking at Violet's birthday gifts, and speculating as to how they should spend *their* birthdays when they came round. And now, alas, they were even getting weary of telling tales, for none of the little story-tellers seemed to know another tale to tell.

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"I wish," said Violet, suddenly, "that some one grown up would tell us one." And, as she spoke, she looked at her mother, who smiled, and replied,

"Very well, dear, if all of you wish it, I will tell you of a birthday walk I once took in Florida, when I went for the doctor, shall I?"

There was a hearty chorus of "Oh, do, please," and Mrs. Burnley glanced at the Sussex Downs, so dimly seen in the twilight, as if she saw another and different kind of landscape, and commenced as follows:—

I was left an orphan at twelve years of age, and was taken by an uncle and aunt, who resided in Florida, to live with them as an adopted daughter, and also as a child-companion to my aunt, who was often very lonely; for my uncle had to travel about a very great deal, and when he was away we, of course, were left very much to ourselves in our white, wooden house, or rather bungalow, which was called "Pine Cottage," because it was entirely built of pine wood.

And sometimes my Aunt Myra and I were very lonely indeed, for we were several miles from any settlement, and were for days together without anyone but our two selves to speak a word to, excepting, of course, Caterina, the Mulatto woman (our sole servant or help) and little four-year-old Daisy, my uncle and aunt's only child.

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And sometimes, even now, I wonder what we should have done without dear, pretty, affectionate little Daisy, for she used to run in with her pinafore full of oranges, and her flaxen hair falling in long, loose curls upon her shoulders, and say, "You smile, mamma, you smile!" And how dull soever her mother might be, she was obliged to smile at the little darling, and to try to make some playful reply in return; for I had not been very long in Florida without perceiving, though I was only a child, that neither my uncle nor my aunt liked the Land of Flowers, which, as you doubtless know, is also the Land of Oranges; for, indeed, there are acres and acres of orchards, filled with trees, bearing the gleaming yellow fruit.

I once saw a tree (locally known as the "King of the Oranges") which bore two thousand oranges upon its many branches! Only imagine, children, what a party you could have held under *that* tree! What a feast you could have had under *those* boughs! Indeed, as my Uncle Guy often said,

"We eat oranges, we gain our living by oranges; it is 'oranges, always oranges!' We can never forget we're in Florida; but a Kentish orchard, with its firm, ripe apples and ruddy cherries, is, to my thinking, worth a thousand orange groves!"

And whenever he spoke thus, my aunt always replied,

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with a sigh, "Very true, Guy dear; and I'm sure a bunch of primroses is worth twenty bouquets of these gorgeous, scentless, tropical flowers. I *am* glad that we named our daughter Daisy, instead of Inez, or Nina, or Juanita, or any other of the many Southern names around us, for, at least, we'll try and keep her English until we get back to England again, which I hope we may be able to do soon."

And from hearing such words as these, I knew that my relatives were exiles and strangers in that beautiful land; but for my own part I loved—nay, I still love—the blue-skied, balmy, magnificent Land of Flowers, with its queer-shaped orchids and its great, dark, solemn forests.

Yes, my dears, I was fond of Florida, and I think of it even now, as some day some of you may think of your early homes, and of the walks you have taken on these pleasant Sussex Downs.

I used to sit for hours and dream through the long and sunny mornings, whilst little Daisy played at my feet. Once or twice, it is true, she put up her little forefinger, and shook her head, as she said, "Naughty, naughty nake; Daisy don't like nakes (snakes);" and upon looking up I saw a long green-tinted body gliding off in the distance. But I had learnt to be fearless even of snakes, which was a thing my aunt never could do, for the sight of the reptiles,

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she declared, always gave her as sudden a shock as if she had never seen one before.

And there came a time when we were all of us thankful that I was fearless. Early one Summer morning I jumped out of bed with the exclamation, "I'm really and truly thirteen to-day," and directly I had dressed I hastened downstairs.

"Many happy returns, my pet," said my uncle, as he gave me a kiss; "may you be better every birthday; may you be happier every year. See here, Miss Katie, your uncle has brought you a little present to remember him by."

And almost before I could answer, "You know that I *couldn't* forget you, dear uncle, even if I tried," he whistled once or twice, and called, "Carlo, Carlo, come out, sir, and show yourself," and a beautiful spaniel crept from under the sofa, and ran up to me, wagging his tail as he came.

I should just like *you*, dear children, to have seen my Carlo as I saw him on that never-to-be-forgotten birthday, and I am quite sure that you would have admired his soft dark eyes, his drooping ears, his silky black coat, his feathery paws, and last, but not least, his musical bark, almost, if not quite, as much as I admired them myself.

My poor little spaniel; even now as I describe him I can

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fancy I see him jump on my knee, and look up into my face as if he quite recognized me as his mistress, and was ready to go everywhere with me, and do everything he could to show his love and fidelity, and he was indeed faithful, aye, faithful even unto death.

As you may readily imagine, I did not know how to thank my uncle for his delightful present. I could only sit quite silent with the dog in my lap, and feel and look the joy and gratitude which words could not express, and before I could recover from my astonishment my uncle and aunt kissed me, bade me take care of myself and of Daisy, gave a few parting instructions to Caterina, and then set off, on a two days' business journey, to a neighbouring town, called The Springs, and I stood at the vine-wreathed door, and looked after them as far as ever I could, then, somewhat sadly, re-entered the house.

For what seemed at that time a most doleful prospect lay before me—with the exception of old Caterina and little Daisy, *I was to keep my birthday alone.*

Alone, and I should have liked to have a party of friends, with whom I could have played under the shade of the great magnolia, which overshadowed one side of the house. I could have sat down on a log, and have wept out of sheer self-pity.

Then just as I was bitterly reproaching myself for my seeming ingratitude to my uncle and aunt, I heard Daisy's

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voice calling, "Katie dear, Katie, won't you please come and take this naughty pain away?"

And when I looked for the little one I found her lying, flushed and restless, in her own little cot.

"Why Daisy, poor little Daisy, what's the matter?" I asked, as I knelt by her side and laid my hand on her hot face.

"Poor Daisy's head aches, Cousin Katie. Won't you put something on it to make it better, as mother does?"

I steeped cloths in vinegar, and put them on the poor little aching head, but they did not take the pain away, and she soon grew worse instead of better. Very quickly the illness gained upon the poor little girl, as it does in those semi-tropical countries. Hour by hour the chubby hands grew hotter, the aching brow throbbed more painfully, and the blue eyes grew bright as the fire-flies in the groves and thickets at night. Oh, how rapidly she grew worse, and at last her childish prattle began to run wild, and I saw that she did not know what she was saying. Then I began to fear for my poor little cousin.

Dear little Daisy, who loved me so, whom I, too, loved so dearly, I could not think of her dying; and even as I tried to put the terrible thought away from me, old Caterina said, "What's to be done, missee; what's to be done?"

And as I drearily repeated, "Yes, what's to be done?"

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I thought, "Oh, if only Uncle Guy and Aunt Myra were at home, how thankful I should be." But there was the trouble, they were already far away from us. They had left their darling fast asleep in her cot, and started upon their journey believing that all was well.

And oh, what was to become of Daisy? The nearest doctor was four miles away, at San José, and all the men were busily working at a distant plantation. True, when they came in at night I could send one of them on horseback with a letter, but the time was too precious to be wasted thus, and Daisy might die before help came. Caterina and I were the only human beings near the suffering child.

"We muss hab de doctor, doctor Perez," said Caterina. "But who'll go fetch him? Ole Caterina can't go, cos her knees shake, and she no more able to run than a baby. Oh, dat lazy Sambo," shaking her fist at the culprit whom she saw in her mind's eye, "de good-for-nothing vagabone. No sooner he see de master start away den he take Paquita and gallop off to 'joy himself. Nebber mind, missee; just you wait till he come back, ole Caterina teach him how to 'joy himself." Then changing her tone once more, she said, "Oh, Missee Kate, who'll go?"

And Missee Katie turned to the faithful old woman, and replied, "Why I'll go, Caterina, and you'll take care of Daisy, won't you?"

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Yes, Caterina would indeed take care of Daisy. She knew what to do till the doctor came, for fever was only too common there, and she would watch her every breath like a mother; and so, with a sigh and an inward prayer, I put on my large sun hat, and calling my little dog, Carlo, to accompany me, I started upon my walk for the doctor.

And what a walk it was! I shall remember its every incident until I die, as you would, had you been in my place.

It was noontide, the sun was high in the heavens, the earth was no longer damp and steaming, but dry and parched with heat; the mighty forest and all things in it seemed fast asleep; only the many-tinted birds flitted about from tree to tree, and the strange and curious flowers drooped their heads languidly in the nearly tropical heat; all was silent save for the sweet, ecstatic, tireless song of the mocking bird, that song which always reminded me of an angel's, for, you know, we cannot imagine a *tired* angel, and even young children may grow weary before the little fight is ended, and the little victory won.

So, with Carlo trotting by my side, I ran along very faint and very warm, but thinking only of dear, suffering, little Daisy, lying fevered and sick in Pine Cottage, asking for Katie to please come and take the pain away; and I wished that my feet could go quicker, or that my arms

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could have been changed into wings, for then I could have flown over the tops of the forest trees, and have told the Portuguese doctor my trouble; but fear made me desperate, as I pushed my way along the tangled pathway where, at any moment, I might have heard the hiss of a snake, or have seen the spotted skin of a panther; and at last I left the forest behind me, and came out at the edge of the desolate plain, called Cypress Swamp, because it was fringed with those dark funereal trees, from whose branches and trunks the Spanish moss hung in long grey waving festoons.

And here on a broken tomb (for this dismal spot had been the burying-place of an ancient monastery), I sat down for a while to recover myself, for, as you may believe, I was nearly spent with fatigue; and as I rested I thought of my uncle and aunt who were, doubtless, at that very hour walking up and down the busy streets of that pretty and picturesque town which is locally known as "The Venice of Florida;" and as for myself I literally seemed to *see* the white sails of the merchantmen as they lay at anchor, and the orange-laden boats as they rose and fell with the wash of the river. I seemed to see Bay Street, with its many shops, where the young alligators were kept alive in small tanks or tubs in some of the windows, where everything pretty under the sun could be bought. Worst of all, I seemed to see myself and Daisy—poor sick little Daisy—walking up and down on the pavement, watching

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the gaily-dressed, bare-footed little coloured children offering oranges and flowers for sale; and then, waking from my day dream, I remembered the miserable truth—Daisy was ill, perhaps dying, and I was yet some distance from the doctor's house, sitting faint and down-hearted on the brink of the desolate Cypress Swamp, with the butterflies flitting about by dozens, and the grasshoppers keeping up a ceaseless chirping in the long rank grass.

So I said to myself, "If you do tumble down, Katie Cameron, there's no one to pick you up; you mustn't be weak, you must try to be strong."

Then I continued my walk; but finding that my shoe was untied, I was about to rest my foot on what I imagined to be a log of wood under the shade of a thick tree, when Carlo, who had been some distance away from me, suddenly rushed up barking most violently—such an angry and tremulous barking, which seemed to say to me, "Mind, Mistress, mind! Beware, Beware!"

Oh! children, what was my horror and disgust to find that what I had imagined to be a log of wood was in reality a monster Alligator.

I started back, and then just for a moment I stood spell bound, held in bondage by deadly fear, gazing at the weak little legs and malicious dull little eyes, which seemed to grin at me as the horrid creature began crawling towards me. Slowly at first, but surely, and with ever-increasing

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speed, he moved on, silent as fate, resistless as time, while my faithful Carlo ventured quite near, barking unceasingly as if he were trying with all his might to divert the monster's attention from me to himself. Indeed, I should already have been lost if he had not warned me of the danger, just as I was about to set my foot on the hideous reptile.

Then, sending up one swift-winged prayer, I started off, running as fast as my legs would carry me, looking back after a while to see if I were yet safe. Alas, alas, the Alligator, instead of myself, seemed to be gaining ground. Who would have believed it could go so fast? My trembling legs refused to carry me very far, and although Carlo's sharp and angry bark seemed to bid me hasten, hasten, hasten, I felt as if I must drop to the ground like a stone to the bottom of a river.

Still I persevered until there was a terrible pain in my side, my breath came in gasps, and I felt as if I had already said good-bye to life. Then I thought of my uncle, my aunt, and darling little Daisy, and wondered if they would ever know their poor Katie's fate. But if I had given up all hope Carlo had not; he barked as if he would spend his last breath in trying to keep the danger from me. Nearer and nearer he went to the Alligator, and at last with a horrid snap the monster's jaws closed on something! What was it? Oh, had he killed my

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dear dog? I could not look; but no, Carlo had been too quick for him, and the cruel grip which was meant to kill him had only torn one of his beautiful long feathered ears. With a cry of pain he ran towards me, looking up into my face with his beseeching brown eyes as if to say, "Little mistress, I have done my best." As I stooped down and took him in my arms, I felt that now indeed all was over.

Just at this terrible moment, when hope had quite forsaken me, there came help; for my eye fell full upon an old stone cross, with the morning glories twining in clusters around it, and I remembered the beautiful old legend, or rather motto, relating to it—"In Thee is salvation;" and in my anguish and terror I cried aloud, "Help, Lord."

And He Who permitted His own Cross to be made, and Himself died thereon for the sake of His beloved children, came in that moment to my aid, and put into my mind a thought, and that thought proved my salvation from the gaping jaws of the Alligator.

For the bands which held me so tightly seemed loosened, and I remembered that my uncle once said, "If chased by an Alligator, run in a circle. Always in a circle, for they can only run *straight*."

So I ran round and round till I grew giddy, and nearly fainted, and dropped on the swampy ground, and at length

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my scaly pursuer grew tired of crawling along in a straight line after nothing, and crept back to his home in the very midst of the swamp, where the cypresses were thickest, the shade was densest, and the vegetation rankest.

Then I proceeded in safety upon my way to San José, and before I had gone another mile, just as I had reached the outskirts of the settlement, and was in the midst of an orange plantation, the sky grew as black as night, and the rain fell in torrents, as it *can* only fall in the South. Oh, how it pattered down on the oranges, how it fell through the leaves, and wetted my garments through and through. It took the starch out of my pink muslin frock, it flattened my hat, and, worse than all, it drenched my dear little Carlo till he shivered again and again, though I held him hidden up under my apron, and a pitiable object I must indeed have appeared when I presented myself at the doctor's door.

"Poor leetle girl," said the kind surgeon, "you are in a sad condition indeed, in what you English call a plight, but come in, my child, and have some refreshment, whilst I get ready to go back with you. And the poor leetle dog, too, is he hurt? Pedro, come here and bathe the young missee's leetle dog, and bind up his ear."

So I thanked the kind doctor, changed my wet dress for a warm woollen garment belonging to his own little

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daughter, and gladly accepted the help for my poor dog, and for myself a cup of tea made in Russian fashion, with a slice of lemon, which I drank whilst the doctor was preparing some medicine.

Then Carlo and I mounted up into the gig, beside Dr. Perez, and we started on our way to Pine Cottage.

Every now and then my companion exclaimed, "Is our leetle friend so very ill, did she sheever, is she conscious?" and so on, but I could scarcely reply, for the encounter with the Alligator had broken my nerves so much that I almost expected to hear that Daisy was dead.

And when we arrived at the house I could only gasp out "Daisy!"

"She's about de same, missee, only worse," replied Caterina, as she followed the doctor upstairs.

Yes, the Mulatto servant's illogical answer was only too true. She *was* the same in one sense, for she was still delirious, but not in another, for she was very much worse, as I knew when the Portuguese shook his head, looked at me curiously through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and exclaimed, "Just in time, I believe, but *only* just in time; we must try and make our leetle friend turn the corner."

And turn the corner she did, but what a corner it was to turn. How slowly she did it, how languidly the little feet came round it, how pale the baby face looked when

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it was rounded, but how much more we seemed to value our newly-recovered treasure when that dreaded corner was turned, how gladly we watched her playing amongst the oranges again.

Dr. Perez would not leave her that night, and sent his own man to The Springs to tell my uncle and aunt what had happened. You may be sure they were not long in returning, and that they were very kind to me for having, as they said, saved their little Daisy's life, but I told them that Carlo deserved praise more than I did, for if it had not been for him both Daisy and I might have died.

As for Master Sambo, who had been left at home on purpose that he might be at our service in case we wanted anything, and who had basely deserted us for his own amusement, his punishment was left to Caterina. I don't know what it was, but he seemed very quiet and dull for some time afterwards, and one day said to me, "Sambo welly solly he run away, missee; he nebber tink de lilly missee goin' to be ill, but he nebber do so no more." Then, with a point of his finger towards Caterina's domains, he whispered, "Miss Katie, you nebber tink dat ole woman could be so strong." As to Caterina, when she was asked what had happened, she merely said, with rather a grim smile, "Yes, missee, ole Caterina can teach dat boy how to leave us all and go off and 'joy himself."

Sometime afterwards we quitted Florida, and as we

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stood on the deck of the homeward-bound steamer, Uncle Guy said, "Well, good-bye to the Land of Flowers," and my Aunt said gaily, "Yes, and good-bye to the snakes and mosquitoes;" rather regretfully said little Daisy, "Good-bye to the beautiful oranges;" but I was taking my Carlo with me, and knew that I should never part from him as long as he lived, my faithful little friend who had saved my life, and Daisy's, too, when I took that dreadful walk to the doctor.

Children, my little story is ended; but before I wish you good-night, let me wish one and all of you a Birthday as happy as Violet's has been to-day, and if ever you are in difficulty and danger, I hope you may have as brave and faithful a companion as Katie Cameron's Dog.

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Philip's Birthday Present.

BY FRANCES CHARLTON.

IN a few days Philip Curtis would be twelve years old. He was looking forward with the greatest eagerness to his birthday, for it was to bring him something he had set his heart on for a whole year! His parents loved him dearly, and were never so happy as when indulging his wishes, but they were not rich enough to give him all he wanted, still less all he wished for. Philip perfectly understood this, and knew that in order to give him a costly present they were obliged to deny themselves something they would have liked. Therefore, he valued his possessions, and cared for them in a manner that no child who had everything the moment he wished for it, no child who had not been taught to think and feel for others, could possibly understand. But this delightful present was really coming at

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last, and Philip felt sure that next Saturday would be the very happiest day of his life.

He was to go up to town with his father, buy the present himself, and bring it home in triumph to show his mother and his little brother, and above all, his sister Nellie, nearest to him in love as well as in age—warm-hearted, generous Nellie, always more pleased at his pleasure than at her own. In her eyes Philip could do no wrong; he could always make her laugh, even through the hearty tears of baby troubles. As she grew older she toddled about everywhere after Philip, his name was the first that, in baby language, she learnt to say, and she was never happy out of his sight.

This love had grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength, until now she was as devoted a slave to her brother as their father would permit, but they both knew that while carelessness or childish naughtiness only brought a grave look to their father's face, a sharp word was sure to follow any want of courtesy on Philip's part towards his mother or sister.

"But, father," Philip once said, "I believe mother likes me to have the easy chair when I come home from school; she says she doesn't care for easy chairs. And I'm sure Nellie would ever so much rather lace up my boots for me than let me lace hers, and if she wishes to give me something of hers she seems quite hurt if I don't take it."

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"That is all quite true, my boy; but that is the very reason why you should not take advantage of this unselfishness. Your mother and sister do everything for you from love, asking nothing but your love in return, but you must not think they do not value your affection, or that it does not make them proud and happy when you show them respect and courtesy."

So Philip was learning to be a little gentleman, and the great charm of his birthday present was that it would give pleasure to others as well as to himself.

And what was this wonderful present to be? What was it that was to make a boy of twelve so proud and happy? Well, it was something that the boys of twenty years ago could not have bought had they been ever so wealthy. It was a tricycle! Philip had a long walk to school, but his tricycle would take him so quickly that he would be able to come home every day to dinner, and that was a great thing in itself, but on half-holidays what pleasure was in store for him! The tricycle was to have a little seat in front on which Nellie could sit while her brother whirled her along through country lanes, never stopping till they reached some sheltered nook where they could read a favourite story or gather wild flowers in the Spring, or nuts and blackberries in the Autumn; perhaps they might even ride as far as the trout stream, and bring home enough of the pretty speckled fish for their High

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Tea. Why, it was almost as good as having a pony—at any rate, it was quite the next best thing.

It was hard work to keep a secret from Nellie, but Philip thought there ought to be a surprise for someone, or it would not seem like a birthday present, and as he himself knew all about it he was looking forward to his sister's astonishment and delight.

The day came at last, and Philip left with his father, bidding good-bye in a very mysterious and important manner to Nellie, whose own little gift had been duly presented and acknowledged.

The boy was intensely interested in the crowded streets, for although he lived so near London, he seldom came into the great city. He noticed that many cabmen and drivers had little pink and white flags flying from their vehicles, and his father told him they had carried them for several days past to remind people that this was Hospital Saturday. And Philip saw ladies sitting patiently at street corners to receive the money dropped by passers-by into the boxes provided for the purpose.

As the boy walked along, his face was so bright and happy, that even anxious men of business, hastening to their daily toil, felt as if a ray of sunshine had somehow broken from the leaden London sky; and a ragged little London Arab, with pale, pinched features, and eyes sharp as ferrets, that seemed to see into a dozen corners

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at once, stopped for a moment his hoarse shrill cry of "Pa-per" to glance at Philip, dimly wondering the while what it was that made this boy so different from himself.

The difference lay in one word, one little word; Philip had a home, a real home—poor little Bill Jones did not even know the meaning of the word.

"Good-bye, my boy," said Mr. Curtis, when his office was reached; "you know your way. I hope you'll make a good choice."

"I hope so, father."

Yes, he knew his way, for he had been to the great warehouse before. He had pleaded earnestly to be trusted with the purchase of his present, for he said, "You know, father, if I go alone I can take as long as I like in choosing, but if you go with me, your time is so short that I shall feel I must not hinder you, and perhaps I shall not get the very best one there."

So on he went with his money safely deposited in his new purse, Nellie's present to him that morning.

Remembering his promise to be careful, he paused by the Mansion House until the tall policeman was at liberty to help him across the road—a crossing which the reckless street boys threaded like eels, but to strangers a passage truly terrible, and to all as fraught with dangers as a battle-field.

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Suddenly, above the deafening roar of the street, Philip heard a wild shriek, and then, to that ceaseless din succeeded almost a hush, as cabs and omnibuses pulled up, and people ran to see what was the matter. Philip had noticed a brother and sister who, not so cautious as himself, had attempted that dangerous crossing, and now he saw a girl who, but that she was poorly clad, might have been mistaken for Nellie, standing in the road, with hands clenched and face blanched with terror, gazing at a lad who was lying insensible in the road, how much injured none could say.

"Oh, it was for me—he saved me at the risk of his own life," cried the poor girl in tones of anguish, "he saw that the cab was close upon us, and pushed me out of danger, and then he was knocked down himself. Oh! what shall I do?"

With giant's strength, yet with the tenderness of a woman, the policeman, aided by a navvy, lifted the poor boy into a cab, and he was driven slowly to the hospital.

Unquestioned, Philip took his seat beside the heart-broken girl, and when her brother had been admitted to the hospital, and all necessary questions asked and answered, she was kindly told that he was not fatally injured.

"Thank God! But mayn't I see him, sir?"

"No, for he must be kept very quiet just now, but you may come soon—on the next visiting day, and in the meantime he will be well cared for."

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Weeping bitterly, the poor child turned away from the great doors.

"Oh! how shall I tell mother?" she cried.

"Shall I go with you?" asked Philip; "where do you live?"

"Not far off, just down here in Golden Alley. I don't know why they called it so, for silver is scarce enough, let alone gold. We didn't always live there; but father is dead, and mother has very little to keep us all. Lately, Tom has earned some money, and been such a help to her, and now he is laid up," and the tears and sobs burst out afresh.

Philip saw that the child needed care only less than her brother had done; she was evidently suffering greatly from grief and the dreadful shock. He took her hand, and she led him from the wide, open space through dingy streets into a long, narrow lane, a thoroughfare, indeed, but rarely traversed by any carriage more sumptuous than a costermonger's barrow.

It was a crazy staircase up which Philip followed his fair-haired guide, but the little room into which she shewed him, though very scantily furnished, was perfectly clean.

"Don't fret so, Lizzie," said the poor mother, when she had heard the story of her boy's accident, "it's a bad job, indeed, but it might have been worse. Thank God our Tom was not killed."

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"But, mother, the rent—what will you do about the rent?" asked Lizzie, piteously; "you know the agent said that if we were behind again he would take your furniture, and we should be turned out into the street."

"We must do our best, Lizzie; perhaps he will let us stay when he hears what has happened."

Then turning to Philip, she said, "Thank you kindly, Sir, for bringing my Lizzie home; she'll be better when she has rested a bit, and got over the shock."

Philip's heart was very full; the sight of the hospital boxes, with their patient guardians, the working men —brain workers as well as hand workers—leaving their gifts for the great charity, had made him very thoughtful, and then had come a startling proof of the blessings bestowed by the hospitals. Now, for the first time, he was brought face to face with real poverty—the shrinking poverty which struggles so hard to keep itself respectable, which can bear to starve, but cannot bear to beg.

Suddenly Philip remembered that he had money in his pocket—enough money, he was sure, to pay Mrs. Bolton's rent for many a week. He would not touch what had been given to him for his expenses in town; but the other, the money for his tricycle, that was surely his own, and did not these poor people want it more than he did?

"Please take this," he stammered, rather than said, throwing down the golden sovereigns on the little table.

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"I will go soon and see how Tom is getting on," and half frightened at his own boldness, he hurried out of the little room before his astonished hearers could utter a word.

In his excitement he walked quickly to the railway station, whence he was to take the train to his home; and now it was that a re-action began to set in; he was returning without his tricycle, without the money so carefully treasured for the purpose of buying it.

As he realized the impossibility of carrying out his plans of happiness for Nellie and himself, a cold sense of disappointment stole over him—and then, what would his parents say? This money had been given him for a special purpose, had he any right to use it for another?

More than his father's disapprobation he feared his mother's, and he understood now what she meant when she said to her husband, "I believe you would give me and the children away, John, if you had nothing else to give." When his father came home fagged and weary he enjoyed the peace and rest of home too much to care whether the old arm-chair were shabby or not. Nay, it was even dearer to him for its marks of long service. But with his mother it was different. She took great pride in her house, and often sighed over the worn carpets and faded hangings which she could not afford to replace by newer and prettier things. Would she not think that

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if her boy did not buy his tricycle the money might have purchased some of these?

Philip was not afraid that she would be angry with him, but he was afraid that she would think him foolish and impulsive, and his mother's opinion was greatly reverenced by him. It was a consolation to remember that Nellie knew nothing about the tricycle, for he could hardly have borne the pain of seeing her disappointment.

Many and eager were her questions when Philip appeared, and with deep interest she listened to his story.

"Mother," asked Philip, stealing to his mother's side, and looking anxiously in her face, "have I done wrong?"

His mother looked at him for a moment, and in the silence Philip thought he could hear his heart beat, so tumultuously it throbbed.

Then a tender look softened his mother's face as she said, gently, "No, my son, I cannot say that you have done wrong, although it would have been more prudent to make enquiries before giving away so large a sum of money. We will hope that it has been well bestowed, and will do real good. But, Philip, this will be a great loss to you—are you sure you do not regret it?"

"Oh, mother, I——" Philip's voice choked as he leant his aching head against that sure place of refuge from all his troubles, and sobbed out the sting of his disappointment on his mother's breast.

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"And you were not vexed with him?" asked his father, afterwards.

With a tremulous smile, which, like a gleam of April sunshine, was almost drowned by a tear, the mother answered, "At first I did think he had been foolish and rash, but, John, at that moment he looked so like you that I could do nothing but help him to bear his sorrow—for it is a real sorrow."

It was a long, long time before Philip had a tricycle, but when it came at last it was well worth waiting for. Many a visit did the boy pay to Tom Bolton in the hospital, and many were the blessings showered upon him by the grateful family.

One day the house-surgeon, who had often noticed Philip's bright intelligent face, and the intense interest he seemed to take in everything connected with the hospital, said to him, "How would you like to be a doctor, my boy?"

From that moment Philip's mind was made up, and, aided by his kind friend, the surgeon, in spite of many difficulties, he in time studied for a profession which seemed to him the noblest of all.

* * * * * *

Six years after, Philip was spending his holidays with his parents at a small village by the sea. Nellie and he were as close companions as ever, and passed many happy hours together.

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Nellie was very proud of her swimming, but one day she ventured out too far, and on trying to return had no strength to battle against the fast-running tide. She was rescued by a boatman, alive, but insensible, and no one knew what to do in order to save her from sinking into the deeper insensibility of death.

Happily Philip was near, and how thankful he felt for the skill and knowledge which, with God's blessing, enabled him to restore his sister to consciousness and to life.

"If you had not been here, I believe we should have lost our darling," said his mother.

"Six years ago, Philip, you gave up your birthday present, but as bread cast upon the waters, it has come back to you now after many days — a costly present, indeed, the gift of your sister's life."

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Flop,

Or, a Story of Two Birthdays.

BY HELEN A. WILMOT-BUXTON.

HIS real name was Francis Lawrence Oliver Peters, but we always called him Flop. You will see why if you look at the initials F. L. O. P. He was not nearly grand enough to have such a long name as Francis Lawrence Oliver Peters, and Flop exactly suited him. We all made fun of Flop, he was such a queer little fellow, and could never speak without stammering. He was only eight years old when he first came to school, and he did not like it. We thought him very stupid because he could not hit a ball properly, and the way he batted was enough to make a cat laugh, Johnson used to say.

Johnson was our head boy, and the captain of the eleven—a very clever fellow. He was thirteen, and had

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taken no end of prizes. But he was quite as good, if not better, in the playground; then you should see him swim. He was very tall and strong, and rich too. Yes, I think Johnson had everything that he wanted, so, of course, everyone liked him, and he was very popular. His father had estates in the West Indies, and kept horses and all manner of things, and gave him almost as much pocket money as he asked for, and he was always asking.

Poor Flop was just the contrary of all this. No one seemed to care about him. He wore such shabby clothes that our matron said it was a disgrace, and he only had the least little bit of pocket money.

It was only a small preparatory school where we were, and there were just twelve of us till Flop made the thirteenth. I rather liked being at school. There was the meadow where we played, and the river where we bathed, and the garden to keep neat. We looked forward to our holidays, of course, and next to them and prize-day, we liked our birthdays.

We did our lessons as usual, of course, unless a special letter came from home, which did not often happen. But there were the presents to look at, and the feast in the dormitory after everyone was supposed to be in bed—a feast provided, of course, by the boy whose birthday it was.

Johnson generally had sixteen or seventeen presents, not counting the two sovereigns from his grandfather and the

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ten shillings from Aunt Bessie. He used to make us pay a farthing a head to be allowed to look at them.

We all had presents and letters on our birthdays—all but Flop, at least. How well I remember how disappointed we were when we found out that Flop's birthday brought him neither hamper nor present. We could not believe it at first, and thought he was mean and wanted to keep his things all to himself. Whenever the postman came we said, "Here comes a present for Flop," but although he came several times, he brought nothing for him, not so much as a letter, until the next day, when what do you think he had? Why, a paltry post-card.

Flop was very miserable when we told him how different our birthdays were, but he did not say very much, and so, of course, we had no idea how much vexed he was—how should we? We all invited him to our feasts, and let him see our presents, which ought to have satisfied him, but it did not, and he went away and cried because his friends never sent *him* any presents. He fancied we should think less of him because he did not receive letters and gifts, and despise him it seemed, so he would go away by himself and mope and bemoan his fate, little goose that he was.

When Johnson's birthday came, of course we all paid our farthings to see his presents. Johnson told Flop he would not take one from him, because he had not too

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many for himself; but Flop blushed, and persisted in giving it, which I thought very proud of him.

They were very magnificent presents, as usual—a knife with four blades, a corkscrew, a gimlet, and an implement for extracting a stone from horses' shoes; a portmanteau, a pocket-book, a new bat, a football, a pistol, a cabinet for butterflies, a tool chest, and a microscope, to say nothing of a desk with secret drawers, which no one could open, not even Johnson himself.

Besides these, of course, there was the hamper and the postal notes. Johnson was very lordly with us to-day, and hit me over the knuckles for touching his football, but he offered to give Flop his old bat, which he said he no longer wanted.

"Don't you wish you were like Johnson, Flop, to have such lovely presents?" I said, and Flop nodded.

"I wonder why no one sends *you* presents," said Carter.

Flop said he did not know, but hazarded an opinion that he would have some next birthday.

That night we had a rare feast in the dormitory, and Johnson made Flop tell us some stories, which he could do very nicely when he was not nervous.

Next year, when Flop's birthday came round again, the little goose could not bear the idea of passing another like the last, thinking we should laugh at him and crow over him. I need not say we should not have done anything of

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the sort, but he thought we should, and he wanted so much to stand high in our regard, and show us that he had friends to think of him, that what do you think he did?

Why, he determined to send himself presents. He thought to deceive us, you see, so he packed up a lot of things, and spent all his little pocket money in postage stamps all but three and sixpence, which he had saved, and which he bought a postal note with.

I never heard of such a ridiculous thing in all my life, and it all came of Flop's being afraid of people thinking him neglected, which he was. He said afterwards that he could not bear our looking upon him as a person of such insignificance as not to have his birthday remembered.

Of course it was all a secret, and Flop went very mysteriously to post his letters and packages himself, and came back quite cheerful and important.

It was Carter who found him out and told us, and we laughed very heartily about it, and someone proposed that we should play him a trick to show him that we knew what he had done, and to punish him for the deception. So we put our heads together, and laid our plans, but what they were I will leave you to find out.

Flop's birthday came.

"I suppose you'll have a lot of presents to-day, Flop," said Carter; "the house won't hold them."

Flop smiled a self-satisfied smile, but said nothing.

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"There is the postman coming up the drive now, and he has a packet," cried Bullock.

"Run and fetch it, Carter," said Johnson; but Flop had already started.

"It is something for me," he said; but seemed in no hurry to open it.

"Open it, F. L. O. Peters," cried Carter.

Flop coloured.

"There is no hurry. I—I—I'll do it presently," he said.

But we surrounded him, and insisted upon his opening it. Only Johnson stood aloof, watching us from the fence. Johnson was very soft-hearted, and I think he was sorry for Flop.

Flop's hand trembled. He undid the string at last, and began slowly and unwillingly to unfold the paper.

"Let's see it, Flop, let's see it," cried Carter.

"Be quick; we're all impatient," added Bullock.

"I believe it is a knife with six blades, or a concertina, like Johnson's," I said.

"I would rather keep it to myself," said Flop. "What is the use of having presents if one may not keep them?"

"But *we* showed you ours," we all cried. "It is only fair, Flop."

Flop looked more miserable than ever; but we would have no excuses, so he was compelled to open it.

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The packet was wrapped up very carefully in several layers of paper, so that it took some time to undo. At last he came to the precious present, which was a book, but not a new one.

Flop looked up in a shame-faced way, and seemed as if he wished to hide it.

"Why, it is 'Tom Brown's School Days,' and an old copy," cried Carter; "you have it already, Flop, so I'll buy it——"

"No, no," said Johnson, coming forward. "Flop will keep it."

"It is a musty, dirty, old volume, not worth the postage," said Bullock.

"I don't think much of your present, Flop," said Saunders.

We all laughed, and Flop turned very red, and ran away, glad to escape.

Flop was very much excited whenever the postman came, and tried to intercept him, but we kept watch over him. He was compelled to show us all, one after the other, of his grand presents, including the postal note; and we pretended to despise them all, and to be still expecting something better worth having, so that Flop could have cried his eyes out with vexation.

Then another parcel came—a much bigger one, and one that Flop by no means expected.

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His face lighted up, and his eyes sparkled. He was so excited that he could not undo the string at first.

Poor Flop!

"Didn't we tell you something worth having was coming," said Carter.

"I don't know the writing," said Flop, all impatience. "Who can it be?"

He took the knife handed him by Johnson, and cut the string.

First of all came a thick layer of brown paper, then several newspapers, then some whitey-brown, then a wooden box and shavings.

"What *can* it be?" cried Flop.

"Something valuable, I expect," said Bullock.

Then there come another box, this time of cardboard, and some tissue paper, and then, and then—

"Open it, F. L. O. Peters," we cried.

"Perhaps it is alive," suggested one.

But it was not alive.

Flop opened it very carefully, and peeped in.

He started back—then his eyes filled with tears, and his face grew very red, and he pretended to laugh.

Inside the cardboard box was one of his own worn-out shoes with this inscription carefully pinned upon it—"To Flop, with Flop's best wishes."

"I—I—I thought no one would really send me a present—

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it—it—it would be too nice," stammered poor Flop; and in spite of all our teasing and laughter he was so good-natured and so penitent for having been such a stupid as to send himself presents, and try to deceive us, that we felt quite sorry for him. It was a great disappointment, but he got over it wonderfully, saying that he did not mind a bit, which I am sure was not true.

That was quite an eventful day at Hawkshill, I can tell you, and even now it was not over, for we had hardly put away our school-books before another bell sounded, and we heard the carrier talking to old Margery at the door.

The next minute the man entered the school-room with a huge hamper, which was so large and heavy that Margery could not lift it.

"It is for you, Johnson, of course. No one but you get such tremendous hampers," Carter cried.

Johnson stretched himself lazily, and walked up to the hamper, but started back—

"No, it is not, though," he said. "See, it is directed to F. L. O. Peters."

"Then—then—then I won't open it," said Flop promptly. "It—it—it's a practical joke, and you may open it yourselves."

We all laughed.

"Well done, Flop," said Johnson; "I don't wonder at your caution, old fellow. Suppose I open it for you."

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Which Johnson did, and it turned out to be the most splendid hamper possible, for you see we had all contributed very largely, and chosen just what each of us liked best.

"It was a shame," Johnson said, "that such a little fellow should not have a nice birthday," and so he had suggested the plan, and, of course, being rich, gave very generously.

Flop never knew, for Johnson would not let us tell him, and that night we had a feast, the magnificence of which I shall never forget.

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Gerald's Rescue,

(FOUNDED ON FACT.)

BY CAROLINE BIRLEY,

AUTHOR OF

"JESSAMINE AND HER LESSON-BOOKS," "THE LINEN-ROOM WINDOW," ETC.

"The elephant now goes round;
The band begins to play:
The little boys pulling the monkeys' tails
Had better get out of the way."—SONG.

NOT very far away from London is an old-fashioned country town called Methby, which, besides the Green and the Lower Green, and other plots of grass which are not called Greens, has a great Common near it. Pretty little houses stand at the edge of this Common, and the people living in them enjoy an extensive view over the verdant plain, which makes such a perfect playground for their children.

But Guy and Guida, the all but nine-year-old twin son

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and daughter of a gentleman named Mr. Sefton, whose business took him every day to town, used to think no other house in Methby had quite so nice a view as theirs. This, The Gables, was at an end of the Common, close to its junction with another and more trodden piece of grass; and even on wet days, when you couldn't go out, it was hardly possible to be dull there, so much was to be seen from the bow-windows.

Now, one remarkably wet day in August last, these children were sitting together in the wide seat of the nursery window, their heads pressed against each other, and talking so eagerly, that, for once, they were forgetting to look out of doors, and hadn't certainly a moment to bestow on their little brother Gerald, who was kneeling at the window, pretending to catch the rain-drops as they trickled down the pane. But he was a happy little fellow, who could amuse himself, and didn't mind being neglected by his elders; and no wonder they were interested in the subject in discussion, for it was that most important one to childhood — what treat, or pleasure, would be given them on their coming birthday?

"The day after to-morrow!" said Guida. "Well, that *must* be here pretty soon now. But hasn't it been a long time in coming this year?"

"Very," Guy agreed. "Well, I know, I know, what I would like best of all."

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"What?" said his sister, anxiously.

Guy had the will which settled their affairs, and though she knew quite well what it was that he had wanted yesterday, that was not to say she knew his wish to-day.

"To have a whole long day with father at the Crystal Palace. Do you remember how jolly it was when Mrs. Merrifield took us there last year?" And Guy gazed into the distance, where, on fine days, the high Palace towers might be seen to glitter in the sun.

"Yes," said Guida, wistfully. "But do you think that this time we shall be allowed to choose whether we will have presents or a treat? You see mother has been ill so long now, and I heard father telling her the other day that he was very, very busy. I don't believe he will have time to take us anywhere."

There was a little pause.

"I like a treat *much* better than presents," was the gloomy result of Guy's meditations.

"And so do I," said Guida. "At least, at the time I do. But then, presents last so much longer."

"Look! look!" said Gerald, turning round a radiant face, and then laying it against the window, so that nothing could be seen of his head but a mass of golden curls.

"Oh, they *last!*" returned Guy; "but what's the good of their lasting when we've given up caring for them? And they don't last *whole*, even when one tries to keep

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them. You know you always say that I gouged in your doll's eyes; and I am sure it was you who lost the three bits out of my dissected map."

"Only one!" said Guida, ruefully. "The bit I threw at father in the road to make him turn and look at me, and it was horrid of the cart-wheel to go over it before we picked it up next day. And, Guy, you know you *did* crush Rosabella's eye right into the middle of her head that day I had to let her be Prince Arthur, because you *would* be Hubert, and Gerry cried so when you put your fingers on his face."

"Jolly!" exclaimed Gerald, in an ecstasy, not of gratitude for his merciful escape, but because such a beautiful sight was going past the windows.

"Gerry! Why didn't you tell us? Have we missed anything?" said the twins, likewise flattening their noses on the hard, damp glass.

For the road from London was before them, and along it at that moment came a dark green caravan, or large close carriage, used for carrying wild beasts, and on the outside was a picture of a lion in the jungle, with these painted words above, "Saunders' Royal Travelling Menagerie." Behind came two more green caravans, as imposing in size, but with different pictures; and a couple of waggons, laden with planks and forms and big wide pieces of wood.

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"Hurrah! A Wild Beast Show!" said Guy; and Guida, who had plenty of imagination, added, in an awestruck whisper,

"I almost think I hear a roar."

"Suppose the Show doesn't stop here!" said Guy. "Oh, here come the other caravans!"

And these two last were smaller, and were painted yellow, and were homes for people, not wild beasts. Each had a chimney funnel in the roof, and in the sides were little windows with white curtains, looped back with something pink. And two merry little children were peeping out of the door of the hindmost caravan.

It was with almost painful excitement that Guy and Guida watched whether or no the procession would halt in Methby, and to their joy, it did. But the great "Saunders" was provoking enough to pass the broad Common altogether, and go on to a place on the nameless grass where the little Seftons could only see just enough of the backs of the conveyances to satisfy them of their presence.

But—"At any rate," said Guy, "we know now what to choose for our treat. Guida, you must find out from father to-night, or to-morrow, if he has settled about our birthday."

Guida looked distressed. "Please not, Guy," she

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entreated. "You know father and mother don't like us to ask anything about it beforehand."

But Guy was inexorable. "I can't help that," he said. "Perhaps the Show will only be here for one day, and we must beg him, if so, to let us go to it to-morrow, instead of Thursday."

That word, Thursday, of which he had been hearing a good deal of late, caught Gerald's ear, and he came and put his cheek against his sister's. "I wish Thursday was *my* birthday, too, Guida," he said, with a very big sigh.

"Never mind, Gerry," she answered, kindly. "You know yours will be here just nine days afterwards. Leave out this thumb, and you can count them on your own fat fingers. And then you will be three years old. Amabel has four whole months to wait before she can be two! But," and she smiled brightly, "it *is* the jolliest part of ours, isn't it, Guy, that we always have it to keep together?"

When, in obedience to her brother, poor Guida put her question to her father at breakfast-time on Wednesday, it was not a success. "Father," she began, "you know to-morrow is our birthday; and we want to know if you will let us——"

"Wait!" said Mr. Sefton, gravely. "The pleasure you have on your birthday is a treat, and not a right, and

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I thought you were aware that your mother and I like it to be a surprise to you, and do not choose to be questioned about it beforehand. But I will tell you one thing for your comfort. You will probably find your treat, or part of it, waiting for you in your places the next time you come down to breakfast. What a wet day again! Lucky children, to be able to remain indoors!"

And Mr. Sefton rushed off to the station, through the driving rain, leaving his "lucky" children very miserable. What a downfall of their hopes! "*You will find your treat waiting for you in your places at breakfast!*" How could that mean going to the Show?

"He *did* say, 'or part of it,'" suggested Guida, with a lingering hope, but Guy did not think much of it.

Still, nothing but real misfortune could spoil the joy of the birthday when it actually came, and the twins went down to their father with faces as bright as the morning sunshine which was flooding the breakfast-room. They were very like each other, with brown eyes and complexions, and closely-cropped, dark heads; and Guida always liked her winter frocks better than summer ones, because they could be made of the same material as Guy's suits. Their eyes went at once to their places on the table, where, between the plates, was just an envelope, apparently, directed, in their father's writing, to "Miss Guida and Master Guy Sefton." Guy seized and opened

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it with eagerness, and inside was a cardboard ticket, not printed, but with written words, in purple ink—

"SAUNDERS' ROYAL TRAVELLING MENAGERIE.

Family Ticket.

To admit the Nurse and Children of Henry Sefton, Esq., free of charge, during the stay at Methby, 1886.

ALFRED SAUNDERS, *Proprietor.*"

"Father! Thank you! You couldn't have given us anything we like better!" said the children. "When may we go—directly after breakfast?"

"No—directly after dinner. I am coming back early from town to go with you, and then on other days Clara can take you in whenever she has time. Knowing there would be no keeping you away from the Menagerie, I felt I had better compound with the Proprietor to let you in for a fixed sum during the whole visit. He is having a good deal of new woodwork from the timber-yard here, and expects to be detained nearly a fortnight. That will be until after your birthday, too, Gerald."

"I should like him to stay until after Amabel's, in December!" said Guida, joyfully.

And then she and Guy ran upstairs to see their mother, who was ill in bed, and was awaiting them with several presents of books and toys from aunts and uncles at a distance.

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Dinner, that day, at The Gables, was a rapid affair, the children being in such a hurry to set off for the Show; and with Clara, the very young nurse, carrying little Amabel, the youngest of the family, in her arms, Gerald holding his father's hand, and Guy and Guida together as usual, they soon reached the large wooden building. The exterior was gorgeous with green and gold, and thrilling pictures of the animals in their native haunts.

"They won't look quite so wild and spirited in confinement, I'm afraid," said Mr. Sefton; and then Guy, with an important air, displayed the ticket, and the party went inside.

The centre of the long hall was empty, and had sand upon the floor, but around the sides were strong iron-barred cages for the animals. There was the lion pacing up and down his limited area, with the sullen and offended dignity of mien one might expect in a monarch fallen from his high estate; here a hideous camel, with too much leg and too little hair; and, next to him, a very handsome Bengal tiger, looking dangerous enough, though lying down with his claws sheathed, and his eyes half shut, as if almost asleep. Zebras, bears, wolves, jackals, dear gazelles with melancholy eyes, lamas, goats, and a most dejected pair of eagles, filled some of the other cages; and chained up at the further end of the Show, stood, in patient meekness, two fine elephants. They, it was

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stated, would go through a brilliant performance at least twice a week.

But what delighted the young Seftons more than anything else was the cageful of monkeys of various kinds. A large tree-branch was planted in the middle, and they hung about the boughs with hands and tails, grinning and chattering, or chased one another, angrily or playfully, from stem to stem. Guy and Guida tried to play with them through the wires, a little teasingly, perhaps, and were much amused in watching some of the parent monkeys punish or caress their offspring with quite human severity or tenderness. While they were thus engaged, Mr. Saunders, seeing their deep interest, came to speak to Mr. Sefton.

"I have another monkey, sir," he said; "a Brazilian Sapajou, which you may like to see. He is the tamest and most playful one I have, and I let him roam about the place at pleasure. He is never in the cage with the others; they are jealous of him; but he has been shut up by himself just now, while things get settled here. Tom," he called, to one of the keepers, "let Bobo out!"

And in another moment the little long-tailed monkey came hurrying to his master, springing into his arms with every demonstration of delight. Gerald, standing by, looked up with his big blue eyes.

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"Oh, may I touch him, please? May I give him half a biscuit? I put it in my pocket yesterday."

"Touch him, certainly: he likes being petted," said Mr. Saunders. "But he would rather have nuts than biscuit. Here are a few for you to give him, and you can hold him if you choose. Bobo is his name."

"Oh, he is a darling monkey!" exclaimed Gerald, stretching out his arms for him, and Bobo was soon sitting on his new friend's shoulder, with a nut between his nimble well-shaped hands.

When Guy and Guida came up presently, he would not go to them, and, uttering a peculiar plaintive cry, clung piteously to Gerald — perhaps because he was the first stranger who had fed him in Methby, and so proved himself a friend. They were such a funny contrast—Gerald, very fair and round and rosy and sedate, and with bright clustering curls; Bobo, olive-coated, slender-limbed, with his clever, wizen, little, old-man's face, encircled with light shades of fur of golden yellow, and quivering all over with activity and excitement.

"Never mind!" said Guy to Guida, when all their efforts failed to tempt Bobo away from their little brother, "Perhaps he will be just as ready to come to us to-morrow."

"Possibly," said Mr. Saunders, with a smile; "but I advise you not to count upon it. Monkeys are strange creatures, and have their likes and dislikes as unaccount-

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ably as people. And Bobo has, I see, taken one of his sudden fancies to your little brother."

"Perhaps, instead, one of the other monkeys will like *us*," said Guida, wistfully. "Father, must we really go away now? It does seem such a pity."

"Yes; though it is almost like going to have another birthday to be coming back again to-morrow," Guy remarked, as they went down the steps of the Menagerie.

So every day, but Sunday, for the next ten days, and often twice a day, Guida, Guy, and Gerald made their way with Clara to the Show—Baby Amabel being left behind at home whenever anybody but her nurse was able to take care of her; and every evening Mr. Sefton was well pleased to find how many facts in natural history the twins were learning in this pleasant manner.

Gerald's knowledge might be thorough, but was limited not only to one subject, but to one individual—Bobo, his dear Bobo, who always greeted his coming in the prettiest way, and parted from him unwillingly. It was a very deep attachment. Gerald never now at home ate the whole of any fruit or dainty that he thought Bobo would like—a share was always kept for the favourite—and the pennies he had been saving for "a beautiful present for somebody," went one by one to the grocer's round the corner, in exchange for little bags of nuts.

Mrs. Sefton taught the twins to sing a song about a Wild

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Beast Show, which had one extraordinarily long line in it—

"If you ladies there will persist in giving the monkeys apples and nuts,
Why, you'll injure their constitutions."

Only they used to sing "Gerald" instead of "ladies." And in his walks, too, the little boy began to look out for the snails and beetles which Bobo thought great delicacies for his dinner, and was very much disappointed because when Clara found what he was doing, she told him it was cruel, and would not let him get them any more. Gerald had not thought of the cruelty, only of pleasing his playful, winning pet.

Well, time went on, and Gerald, so far from longing for his birthday, like the twins, wished it wouldn't come so quickly, for on that Saturday he must say good-bye to Bobo, as the Show was to leave Methby early on Monday morning. An extra-grand farewell performance with the elephants, Gog and Magog, was fixed for Saturday afternoon, and the Menagerie was crowded with spectators. Clara and her four charges were among them, and she herself was quite as much interested as Guy and Guida. It was certainly very funny to see Gog, the bigger elephant, dressed up, and sitting at a table, with a large white napkin round his throat, pretending to eat his dinner like a gentleman; while Magog, as a waiter, presented his little bill. There were shouts of laughter when Gog fumbled with his trunk in the pocket of his flowered waistcoat, and

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brought out silver coins to pay the bill, and then, from another smaller pocket, condescendingly produced some coppers for the waiter to keep for himself. It was just at this moment that a piercing shriek of terror rang through the building, and every head was turned to see what was the matter.

And the shriek came from the nurse, Clara.

Clara was holding Amabel in her arms, and the three other children had been standing near her. Absorbed in the performance, neither she, nor Guy, nor Guida, noticed that Gerald had stolen away from them to look for Bobo, who as yet did not know that his friend was there. Someone had been teasing him, and he had scampered off, offended, to one of his many hiding-places.

Gerald at length grew tired of looking for him, and feeling very disconsolate, began, by way of amusement, to climb upon the stiff rope railing in front of the Bengal tiger's cage. This railing was very necessary to keep people at a safe distance from the more dangerous beasts, and Gerald, standing on it, and leaning forward towards the cage, was in the utmost peril.

When Clara missed him, and turned round to look for him, she saw, with horror indescribable, that the bright young head was very near the bars, and already the cruel tiger was unsheathing his claws in readiness to clutch this tempting prey. Surely deliverance was impossible! Mr.

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Saunders and the keepers were all far away from that part of the Menagerie, and no one near had presence of mind enough even to try and save the child. They seemed paralysed with dread of what was about to happen.

But, in this extremity of danger, help was at hand. Though no human arm was there to save, a loving, brave, and faithful heart was ready to do service, aided by the wise, and quick, and cunning little brain, endowed by God with instinct to understand the way such service must be done. In an instant more the tiger's powerful paw, stretched out through the bars, would have drawn Gerald in its murderous grasp, had not Bobo, chattering away in great excitement, come speeding over the tops of the cages to the rescue. Reaching the tiger's cage, he dropped down suddenly on the outstretched paw with such a hideous screech, that, in alarm, the tiger drew it in again; and Gerald, equally frightened, started back, and, with a cry, fell off, outside the railing, on to the sanded floor.

He was not hurt, only startled, by his tumble; and could not at first understand why Clara was crying as she rushed up to him and clasped him in a tight embrace. It was with thankfulness for his preservation, she said; and that, too, was why not Guida only, but Guy also, ran to him and kissed him, though in general Guy declared he hated kissing, especially in public. They could realize

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far better than their little brother himself, how nearly they had lost him. Gerald did not like the way in which strangers now kept coming to look at him, and speak to him or Clara, and even shake his hand. It was a great fuss, he thought, and he wanted Bobo.

Ah! poor Bobo! heroic little Bobo! his devotion to his friend had cost him dear. Those sharp claws, that had been meant to enter Gerald's fair white body, had pierced instead the monkey's tender side. He was hurt and bleeding when Tom, his special keeper, hurried to the spot where he was lying on the ground; and, for a minute or two, both Tom and Mr. Saunders thought him dead, or dying.

Gerald's distress on hearing this, can be imagined; but before he left the Show, Bobo was beginning to revive, and the boy was allowed just to go into the private room where the little creature's wounds were being dressed. He went straight up to him, and kissed the ugly, sad, pathetic, little face!

"Clara says you have saved my life, my Bobo, darling," he said, simply. "Thank you, very much. But oh! I am so sorry you are hurt."

"I think he will soon be better now," said Mr. Saunders, kindly. "And if your father likes to bring you, you may come to-morrow, Sunday, afternoon, and see how he is, and say good-bye to him."

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And, by that time even, Bobo was much better; and, the joy of this helped Gerald to bear the pain of parting with him, bravely. But he will not readily forget the loving and courageous little creature who all but sacrificed his life to save him, and he often reminds Guy and Guida of a promise from Mr. Saunders, that, if possible, he will bring the Show again to Methby, at the same time next year.

If so, and such devoted friends as Gerald and Bobo are together on that day, don't you think that Gerald will have as happy a birthday as any I can wish to you, the little readers of this story?

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Toddy's Birthday Feast.

BY HELEN A. WILMOT-BUXTON.

THERE were Janet, Dolly, and Toddy. Janet was twelve years old, and had begun to despise dolls, and to speak of Dolly as her "little sister." If Dolly had not had Toddy to fall back upon, she would have felt quite lonely.

But you see she had, and Toddy was a host in himself.

The children lived in an old house in Chelsea, and went for a walk to the Kensington Gardens nearly every day. Here they played at hide and seek among the trees. Dolly and Toddy invented all manner of other games besides, but the nature of these they usually kept secret.

While playing at them, however, Toddy never committed the impropriety of addressing Dolly by her own name, because for the time being she was somebody else; nor was Toddy any longer Douglas Raine. Sometimes they were princes in captivity; sometimes knights, their

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hoops for the nonce being converted into war horses. But it would take far too long to describe all the games invented by Dolly and Toddy, so I will not attempt it.

The Chelsea nursery was a large and pleasant room, just the sort of room to suggest good games, Toddy thought. There was a cupboard, too, where the children kept their toys.

Toddy was given to making collections, and he had accumulated quite a miniature museum. He used to pick up pretty little shells in the new gravel in the Kensington Gardens. He had some fine specimens of oyster and cockle-shells, some whelks, and a few periwinkles. In his journeys he always kept his eyes open, and so had managed to find many objects of interest in the way of minerals, and had a rooted idea that some day he would come across a precious stone or nugget of gold. All the coal that was brought into the nursery was carefully examined by Toddy, and a few slices, upon the sides of which he could distinctly trace the outlines of fern leaves, were highly treasured among his valuables in the cupboard.

He and Dolly had begun to make a botanical collection as well, but something had eaten it up, which caused them much sorrow and vexation of spirit.

Then Toddy had proposed to collect butterflies, but Dolly would not hear of such cruelty, and called him "a nasty cruel thing" for suggesting it, which touched the

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heart of her brother, and saved the lives of many butterflies.

Whatever Dolly did, that did Toddy; and whatever Toddy did Dolly followed suit.

When Dolly went to stay with her uncle and aunt, Toddy took care of Jim the monkey, Sambo the cat, and Dick the canary, and wrote every day to tell her how the family was getting on, so that she could enjoy herself without any harassing idea that her favourites were being neglected.

Dolly was passionately fond of all animals, and took the liveliest interest in everything living.

She was so tender-hearted, that when she and Toddy discovered that a little brown mouse had taken lodgings for the winter months at the bottom of their cupboard, she was delighted, and even put crumbs of bread for it to eat. The consequence was, that Mrs. Mouse liked her quarters so much that she told all her friends to come and take apartments in the same neighbourhood, which they, of course, did.

"It is just the place for quiet, respectable mice," said little Mrs. Mouse; "one is treated as one ought to be, and everything is done to make us comfortable. The dried flowers are not at all bad eaten as vegetables, and the gum which is used to stick them, makes a delicious sauce. Then there are candles and soap always handy, and the rooms are large and airy."

By degrees, so many mice came to these eligible mansions

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that Martha, the nurse, set a trap to catch the little thieves.

It was a terrible thing for Martha, when Dolly discovered her perfidy, and found the treacherous trap with the poor prisoner inside, sadly nibbling at the toasted cheese.

"I would not have thought it of her—she, who tells us we ought to be kind, to go and do such a cruel thing as that," said Dolly.

"Shall we let it out?" suggested Toddy.

And Dolly saying yes, he opened the trap, and the little mouse scampered away home.

After this, Dolly and Toddy were always on the look-out to rescue the mice, and were so on the alert that hardly any were caught, which afforded them great satisfaction.

The mice increased, and the noise they made in the walls was something alarming.

"It will be my birthday to-morrow night," observed Toddy, one day.

"Your birth*day* to-morrow *night*. What do you mean, Toddy?" said Dolly.

"What I say, Dolly. I was born at midnight, and so it won't be my birthday till twelve o'clock," said Toddy, gravely. "I have a plan, and if you like, after lessons, I will tell you what it is. But it is a secret."

Toddy and Dolly were always having secrets. It is wonderful what a flavour a few secrets give to life. As for Toddy, existence without a few mysteries of this sort

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would have lost half its relish for him. Whatever he did, he liked to invest it with secrecy; but, of course, he always confided such plans to Dolly.

After lessons, they met in the cupboard, and, shutting the door, began to talk in hushed tones.

"I want to have a feast," said Toddy; "I opened my money-box last night, and found three sixpences and half-a-crown in pennies. Is it not a lot?"

"I have very nearly the same," said Dolly.

"We can buy a nice feast of things with that—cakes and things," said Toddy.

"But whom shall we invite to it?" said Dolly.

"Well, Dolly, I have been thinking about that, and I don't know that I shall ask anyone but you and Jim and Sambo. You see, I want to do something out of the common—something, I mean, that we shall be able to talk about and remember."

"I see," said Dolly; "but won't Martha and Janet think it nasty not to ask them?"

"They won't know anything about it, you see," said Toddy, mysteriously.

"How can you keep it secret?"

"Why, Dolly, that is just the point—we're going to have it at night when they are all in bed; won't it be fun?"

The idea was so novel that Dolly clapped her hands, and cried, "Capital!"

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Now, unfortunately for Toddy, a little mouse happened to be sitting just close to his hole at the bottom of the cupboard, and no doubt heard all about it. He kept very quiet so that he was not found out, and then ran back home and told the others.

Dolly and Toddy were very busy making preparations for their feast all day, and the preparations were upon so large a scale that a considerable amount of excitement was aroused among the community in the cupboard.

"I hope we shan't oversleep ourselves," said Dolly.

"Just as if that would be possible," cried Toddy.

All was ready, and the feast put upon the highest shelf in the cupboard.

Toddy and Dolly were so anxious to go to bed that night, that Nurse's suspicions were aroused, and she told them severely that they were to go to sleep at once.

"Good night, Dolly," said Toddy, and then he whispered his last instructions.

"I'll be sure to come," answered Dolly.

Ten o'clock struck, and Martha put out her candle, and went to bed.

Toddy had been listening at his key-hole. All was silent now, so he crept out on tip-toe.

It was very dark and rather cold. He listened at his sister's door.

"Dolly, are you awake?"

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No answer. Dolly had to be awakened.

But to return to the mice.

They took the liveliest interest in Toddy's birthday, and resolved to do full justice to the good things he had prepared.

The more adventurous among them had already climbed up to the top shelf, and were placidly nibbling at the nice feast there spread for them.

Toddy wanted to arrange it prettily on the nursery table, so he came on tip-toe to see if it was all safe, and his entrance of course sent the mice scampering away home.

He lighted a candle, and, climbing upon a chair, reached up to the shelf, then slowly descended.

Now, one of the mice had been so loth to leave the good things, that he had lingered until escape was impossible, and now he found himself entangled in one of the paper bags in Toddy's embrace. The poor mouse was very much alarmed, and began to tremble exceedingly.

Just as Toddy reached the ground, it occurred to the poor little animal that even now he might extricate himself from his dangerous position, and with that intention, he gave a sudden jump, thereby capsizing the unfortunate Toddy, and causing a loud scream and considerable disturbance.

By the time Nurse reached the nursery all was silent, and Toddy was comfortably in bed, but not asleep. The noise had awakened Dolly, and she lay trembling; but Toddy was of firmer stuff, and was not so easily frightened.

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When all was again quiet he returned to the nursery, and spread his feast upon the table, remarking with surprise how much it had dwindled in the course of the day.

He then returned to bed to wait until the lamps down stairs were extinguished, and everyone gone to bed.

Of course the whole point of the thing consisted in the feast being enjoyed secretly, and in the middle of the night. There was something exquisitely comic in the idea of thus getting up, when everyone else was in bed, to eat cakes and drink lemon and orangeade and sherbet.

Perhaps no one but Toddy and Dolly would have understood this; but to them it was enjoyment supreme.

Toddy thought twelve o'clock would never strike, but at last it did, and he rose and dressed at once.

Dolly was wide awake now, and had put on her best gown for the occasion. Her two dolls, Gladys and Daisy, were similarly attired, and all was ready.

"Where is that stupid Sambo?" whispered Toddy; "Why didn't you keep him upstairs, Dolly?"

"Oh! never mind Sambo, he is in the kitchen, I expect."

"But I do mind poor Sambo," said Toddy. "Sambo has just as much right to enjoy himself as Jim or your Gladys and Daisy, and I shall go and fetch him."

"You'll be found out if you do, for there never were such creaking stairs as ours, and papa will think someone has broken in," whispered Dolly.

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Toddy took off his shoes.

When once he had made up his mind to do a thing, it took a great deal to deter him from carrying it out.

"You must not, on any account, go in until I come back," he said.

"Very well," Dolly answered, and sat herself upon the top stair to wait.

Toddy, meantime, went cautiously down stairs. It was a very high house, so that from the kitchen to the nursery was quite a journey.

It was a cold, frosty night, and it was quite remarkable what a noise the stairs made. Toddy began to wonder if they always creaked so much. Then the staircase clock ticked ever so much louder than it generally did.

He thought he should never reach the kitchen. At last he did, and it looked so dark that he ventured to strike a match.

Now it happened that this was the hour when the black-bettles most enjoyed themselves, and they had assembled in full force. Toddy's unexpected appearance startled them unpleasantly, and they rushed across the floor to avoid him, disappearing like magic.

Toddy stood irresolute.

He had forgotten the beetles.

Then he called Sambo softly, and Sambo came out from the housekeeper's room, and rubbed himself against his leg.

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"At last I have got you, you troublesome cat," said Toddy; "why ever don't you keep your engagements?"

He took Sambo in his arms and slowly re-ascended the stairs.

He had just reached his father's door when, to his dismay, the match-box he had been carrying, dropped with a thud upon the stairs, and instantly, he heard someone move within the bedroom. He concealed himself hastily behind a door, but as no one came out of the bed chamber and all was still, he continued his journey.

"At last. You have been a time," whispered Dolly, and they went on tip-toe to the nursery door.

Sambo began to prick up his ears, and seemed to know something was going to happen.

"See how pleased he is," whispered Dolly.

Sambo had reason to be pleased. Little knew kind-hearted Dolly what she was doing.

Softly, Toddy opened the door.

Dolly had lighted a candle and stood just behind him.

Sambo made a spring.

There was Toddy's feast beautifully arranged upon the nursery table, and there were Dolly's mice heartily and unaffectedly enjoying it.

"There must have been a hundred of them," Toddy said, and there they were, poking their nasty little noses into everything.

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Sambo had no scruples upon the subject, and was justly indignant that Toddy and Dolly should be so ungratefully dealt with, so he soon sent them scampering, but the noise was so tremendous that Mr. Raine, who was lying awake listening for a repetition of the sounds he had heard upon the stairs, sprang from his bed.

Firmly persuaded in his own mind, that thieves had broken in, he seized a heavy stick, and thus armed, went softly up stairs.

What he saw was poor Toddy, leaning disconsolately against the wall, contemplating with indignant surprise the ruins of his feast; while Dolly was running wildly about the room making fruitless attempts to catch Sambo, who was running wildly about the room making equally fruitless attempts to catch the mice, who, on their part, were running quite as wildly, trying to get safely to the cupboard.

"What is all this, children?" he cried, taken back by so unexpected a spectacle. "Why aren't you in bed?"

"Oh, papa, it—it—it is only Toddy's birthday feast," said Dolly, desisting from her pursuit of Sambo and running to her father with flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

"Toddy's birthday feast! and at this hour of the night," cried her father, then added, grimly, looking at the disconsolate Toddy, "for the convenience of the mice, I suppose. Well, well, run off to bed."

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The children hung their heads, and reluctantly obeyed; and so ended Toddy's birthday feast, which both he and Dolly regarded in the light of a distinct failure.

But there are, as is well known, two sides to every question, and so far as the mice were concerned it was no doubt looked upon as a complete success.

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His Duty.

BY ETHEL MARY WILMOT-BUXTON.

REX and I were orphans, and all alone in the world; and as he was at school at Portsmouth, and I at one in York, and we generally spent the holidays in the same places, we saw very little of one another. When Rex was nearly thirteen, however, and I was three years younger, we went together to spend the Christmas holidays with Uncle Jack, at Heath House, in Ireland, and it is of the events of these holidays that I am going to tell you.

Rex, you must know, was to be a sailor—indeed, he was "going in" for his midshipman's examination in a few months. What a hero he was in the ideas of his adoring little sister! How frank, and brave, and handsome, with his curly brown hair and bright blue eyes; but then, you see, he was my only brother.

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Heath House was a queer, rambling old place, with ivy-covered walls, a delightful secret chamber, which was really very difficult to find out, and, of course, a "haunted room," which we used to creep into in the twilight, I trying not to show how frightened I was, for Rex was so *very* brave, and said ghosts were all nonsense, or rats, though he did jump one day when the cat suddenly sprang on his shoulder from one of the dusty cupboards.

The house was four miles from the town, close to the sea, and just above a little fishing village, which, with most of the cottages around, belonged to Uncle Jack. He lived quite alone there, with his servants and dogs—such lovely dogs of all kinds and sizes. Newfoundlands, retrievers, pointers and setters, and terriers of all sorts; but the one Rex and I liked best was a splendid black and tan collie, with beautiful eyes, and the most intelligent face you ever saw, who would follow us wherever we went.

For a fortnight we had great fun at Heath House. Sometimes Uncle Jack used to take us out to sea in his boat, sometimes we would scramble about the caves and rocks; but what we liked best was to sit in the kitchen chimney corner and listen to the wonderful tales of the "Admiral," as everyone called him, an old, old servant of Uncle Jack's, who had been a cabin-boy on board the "Victory," when Nelson fought at Trafalgar. He was never tired of telling, nor we of listening to, his wonderful

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sea-stories; but the one Rex liked best was the tale he always ended with—the tale of that glorious battle in which Nelson met his death and won his never-dying fame. The old man's voice would tremble and his eyes grow dim as he told us how his heart beat when he saw the hero's signal—

"England expects this day that every man will do *his duty!*"—and knew that even he, the little cabin-boy, could do *that* as well as the highest officers of the fleet.

It used rather to puzzle me. What was this *duty* of which the Admiral so often spoke? Rex seemed to know all about it, and I made up my mind to ask him, when something else put it out of my head.

The reason was that our usually bright, amusing, Uncle Jack suddenly grew so grave and silent, and seemed so worried and strange that I wondered what could be the matter.

Rex, of course, soon knew, and he told me that Uncle Jack's tenants, copying the example of other Irishmen at that time, had refused to pay their rent, and when Uncle Jack ordered them to quit their cottages, had threatened him with all kinds of harm.

This seemed very strange to us, for as yet the terms "Fenian" and "Boycotting" were unknown to us, as was the lawless, ungovernable character of the men around us.

"They shall pay or go," Rex heard our uncle say to a

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friend, who seemed to be advising him to let them be, and then we heard the gentleman reply, as he rode away,

"Then you will have to take the consequences, Randolph."

These came sooner than we expected. All the servants suddenly left us, except the Admiral; no one would groom the horses, or attend to the garden—no meat, milk, or vegetables were brought to the house, and when the Admiral went down to the village to buy some things, the people would not serve him with them.

"So they have 'Boycotted' us!" said Uncle Jack. "Well, we must get on as well as we can, and show them we don't mind."

We thought it great fun at first, and liked pretending to be servants and trying to cook what food the Admiral could muster, till a dreadful misfortune came. Uncle Jack was riding a frisky horse home from town one evening, when some horrid man, whose face he could not see, sprang up in the hedge and threw a lighted and flaming torch in front of the horse, who became quite unmanageable, and Uncle Jack was thrown off. Fortunately, he was near home, for his ankle was badly sprained, and he could only just manage to reach the house. He would not have a doctor, however, and declared himself lucky it was no worse.

Two or three days passed, and it was Rex's thirteenth birthday. I had plaited him a watch-chain with a long

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piece of my hair; but, to my disappointment, Uncle Jack seemed to have forgotten entirely what day it was—a very important matter in my eyes, for was not Rex now in his "teens," and entitled to consider himself as having taken a long stride towards manhood? Rex did not seem to mind, however; at least, he only said, "My dear Lena, when people have other things on their minds, birthdays are very small matters indeed."

Certainly Uncle Jack seemed more worried and preoccupied than ever that day. It had been snowing hard all the morning, but about three o'clock in the afternoon it cleared up, and was quite fine and sunny.

We were wondering if we might go out and build a boat with the snow on the lawn, when a call from Uncle Jack brought us to his sofa.

"Rex, my boy," said he, putting his hand on my brother's shoulder, and looking into his bright, open face, "I want you to do something for me. I want you to go into town and wait at the office for a packet addressed to me, and then bring it back with you. I may as well tell you that this packet contains a large sum of money and some valuable papers, and it is most important that they should be brought safely back without anyone's knowledge. I only wish I could go myself, or send the Admiral, but he is down with the rheumatism, and there is no one else I can trust."

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"Of course I'll do it for you, Uncle Jack," cried Rex. "There's no great difficulty, and I shall be back before dark."

"That's true; but you must be careful, Rex, for I have a great many enemies in these parts who would be only too glad to do me an ill turn. It's an important charge for a boy of your age, but I know you will do your best."

"Certainly I will," Rex answered, rather wondering that Uncle Jack thought so much of it, and then I begged to go with him. At first my uncle would not consent, but our united pleading was too much for him, and we went off together over the snow.

"We'll take Collie with us, too," said Rex, whistling to our favourite, who came bounding after us, as glad to get out for a run as we were.

"This is a very nice birthday, I think," said Rex, as we tramped along, "and it's fun having this packet to bring back safe. It's like despatches, you know, Lena, that fellows in books have to carry through an enemy's country. They used to cut holes in their arms generally, and sew them up in them to hide them. I hope we shall meet with some adventures!"

At which I enquired, in a horrified tone, if he would have to do *that* to his arms?

"Well, no, I shouldn't," he replied, "but I hope I should do my duty, as they did, all the same."

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Ah, Rex, your boyish wish for an adventure was to be fulfilled in an unexpected way!

When we reached the town we found we had to wait a long time, as the mail was delayed by the heavy snow fall, and it was getting dusk when, with the precious packet safe in the breast pocket of Rex's jacket, we set off home. The moon came out, shining bright and clear on the spotless snow, as we walked along, talking of the happy times we would have when Rex came home from sea, when I was to keep house for him; and sometimes, perhaps, when he had a ship of his own, sail away with him into far distant lands, the glories of which Rex's glowing imagination painted many a bright picture.

Beguiling the long, lonely road in this manner, we had reached the spot where a huge block of stone marked three cross-ways, about a mile and a half from home, when suddenly, to our astonished view there sprang up from the ground, a few feet in front of us, three men, with hideous, masked faces.

I screamed loudly—I could not help it—they looked so dreadful; and Rex pushed me behind him, against the rock, and placed himself in front of me. How fervently I hoped they would take no notice of us; but no! the foremost man walked straight up to Rex, and said, in a deep, hoarse voice,

"Boy, you have a large sum of money about you.

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Hand it to me at once if you wish to reach home alive."

"I won't," answered Rex, firmly, without seeming at all afraid, though his face was white as the snow around us; "it is not yours, nor anything to do with you. Let us pass on."

"Give it to me, I tell you," repeated the man, angrily, and I could see his eyes glaring fiercely down on us through the holes in his mask, "or—I will shoot you as you stand," and as he spoke he suddenly pulled out a pistol and held it almost at Rex's forehead.

Terror-struck at these dreadful words, I whispered, "Oh, give it him, give it him, Rex!" but he only drew himself up to his full height, looking the man full in the face, and I could hear him say in a low voice, to himself, "*It's my duty!*"

I cannot tell exactly what happened next—only there was a fearful pause, and I think I heard the click of the pistol, when there was a loud bark, and a furious growl, and the next minute Collie had the villain by the throat. The pistol went off into the air, while the other two men disappeared over the hedge, and their companion, managing, with the greatest difficulty, to get rid of the dog's hold, rushed after them.

"Run, Lena, as fast as you can," cried Rex, dragging me over the snow. "Oh, thank God we brought Collie," as the dog came running after us.

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"Oh, Rex, how could you keep it all that dreadful time?" I panted out, as we ran along.

"I only did my duty, Lena," he answered.

Duty again! What did it mean? I began to see at last!

How glad we were when we were once more within the walls of Heath House, and, stationed at Uncle Jack's sofa, were eagerly pouring out our tale of peril. Uncle Jack grew very pale as he listened, for he knew better than we did the desperate character of the men with whom we had had to deal, but he said nothing till all was told, when, as he took the packet, he put his hand on Rex's curly head, and said: "You've done your duty well, this day, my boy. I'm proud of you, Rex."

And the old Admiral, too, took one of Rex's hands in his great horny one, and said in his quavering voice:

"Duty, ay lad! Do yer *duty* and the rest will always come right!"

And then I knew what Duty was: just simply doing what was *right*, not what was easiest or pleasantest for ourselves.

Before we went to bed that night Uncle Jack called Collie to Rex, and as the dog laid his beautiful head on my brother's knee, he said:

"This is my birthday present to you, Rex. He has saved your life once, he shall be your own dog henceforth."

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Our pleasant holidays came to an end—as all holidays will—soon after, though not before Uncle Jack's tenants had mostly come to their senses, and had refrained from rebelling against such a good landlord.

Rex has had many birthdays, and many birthday presents, since that eventful day, but among them all there is not one he loves more dearly, or treasures more highly, than that which he won by doing His Duty.

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Two Birthday Stories,

(Told by Grandfather and Grandmother.)

BY FRANCES CLARE.

GRANDFATHER and Grandmother sat under a large and spreading tree in the garden of a pleasant house just outside Sydney in Australia.

And little Willie, their favourite grandson, sat between them on the grass, with his hands full of flowers.

Grandmother, in her lavender silk gown, figured over with pink wild roses, and her white lace cap on her silvery waving hair, looked just like a picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds; and Grandfather was the beau-ideal of a good old English gentleman, all of the olden time. As for little Willie, well, he reminded you of Gainsborough's Blue-Boy, for his eyes were the colour of the sky when it is clearest, or of a Scotch lake in summer time, and his

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velvet tunic and stockings were of the same bright and beautiful tint.

Grandfather was reading the *Sydney Mail*, and grandmother was knitting and reading from a book which little Willie could not read, though he could easily read the story book which his grandmother had given him only that morning, for she was reading the illuminated Book of the Past.

"Grandfather, would you please tell me a story of England?" said the little boy, at length. "I don't want one about Australia, for I know all about the Bushmen, and the early settlers, and the kangaroos. I've heard about them so often that I could tell a story about them myself, I believe, and a good one, too," he added, with great composure.

"A tale about England," said grandfather, smiling. "Well, my dear little man, suppose we both tell you a story of the days when we were young. If I set the example, will grandmother follow it?"

"Yes," the kind old lady would do so with pleasure, and she took up her knitting, and also prepared to listen whilst the old gentleman told the story of

LITTLE BO-PEEP.

It was a very troubled little face which looked up to the clear blue northern sky; it was a very plaintive young voice which so earnestly repeated, "Oh, why won't they

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come six, as they did yesterday? One, two, three, four, five, that's all, and there ought to be six of them. Yes, the black-faced sheep has gone. Where *can* it be?"

And again he glanced at the high untroubled sky, which only looked as blue and serene as it had done before he asked his piteous question, and the Northumbrian hills looked as fresh and green as they had done before.

Poor little Willie Graham, like little Bo-Peep of yore, had lost a lamb, which he did not know how to find, but he was too timid to return home to Hollyhock Farm and confess that it had strayed, not because he was afraid of his father, for he knew that the good-natured farmer would only say, "What, lost a lamb, my lad? How did it happen? Well, we must gang together and seek it."

The boy was not afraid of his father, but he feared his stepmother's tongue, for although she was not a wilfully unkind woman, she had a hasty temper; and Willie, in imagination, saw her standing in the middle of the freshly-sanded kitchen, with its brightly-polished stove, and heard her say, in her sharp voice—

"What, *another* loss, Willie; and it's only a fortnight since you lost your Sunday necktie. Last week you lost a gander, and now you've lost a sheep; you'll lose yourself next, I'm thinking, for there'll be nothing else soon in the place to lose."

Yes, he saw it all; he saw his stepmother in her clean

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stiff lilac gown, which always seemed to grow stiffer and rustle more when she was greatly provoked; he saw his little half-sister Gertie trying (sweet little peacemaker) to put all right between them, by saying, "Willie couldn't help it; he's so sorry;" and he cried out aloud—

"Yes, I only wish that I *could* lose myself for a while, till that black-faced sheep is found."

And he made up his mind that he wouldn't go back until nightfall, although it was his birthday, and he was clad in his new green cloth jacket, with brass buttons as large as half-crowns, and as shining as gold; buttons in which you could see yourself.

Yes, he would have one more look for the missing sheep, and if he found it, all the better, he would sit down to dinner at Hollyhock Farm; but if he did not find it, he would walk straight on to Alnwick, whither his father had gone to a Cattle Fair, and if by any chance he met him returning from thence, why then, perhaps, he would tell him of his loss (everything was lost with little Bo-Peep—nothing was missing), and then—ah, far-off, uncertain then—his father would believe in his contrition, believe that he, little down-hearted Bo-Peep, would not be so careless in the future, and would draw him to himself, and comfort him, even as the shepherds found and comforted the lost and suffering lambs.

"I couldn't be sorrier," said the child, as he wandered

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along. "No, I couldn't be sorrier, for I'm a'most fit to greet" (that means in the Northumbrian dialect to weep).

Yes, he was indeed very nigh to greeting, for, although he looked again in each leafy dell, and climbed once more up the bleak hillside, he could find no little black-faced sheep marked with his father's initials—T. G., for Thomas Graham; and he knew too well that his father could ill afford such a loss, for one rainy season had followed another, one lamb after another had died in the late and bitterly cold spring, a spring whose coming was marked by hailstorms, snow, and sleet.

Month by month, week by week, the bank in the old oak dresser decreased; and every time the farmer looked at the rent-book he sighed, for he knew that the rent would be gathered together with difficulty this half-year; and though his landlord was a good and a thoughtful man, Thomas Graham had a worthy pride, which made it hard for him to say, "I'm behind in my rent, and must ask for a little forbearance," even though he knew that it would readily be accorded.

So, "I wish I could sell myself," said little Bo-Peep, piteously, as he thought of the lowness of his father's bank, "for then I could buy another sheep with the price of myself," for it did not occur to the simple lad that if the farmer were to lose him he would lose the very apple of his eye, and his greatest earthly treasure.

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Thus he wandered on with a troubled mind, which made his footsteps strangely heavy, past shepherd's huts, past a ruined Border Castle, through woods where the "pale, meek primroses" and sweet shy violets were blooming; through quiet hamlets and straggling hillside villages; and every human being he met seemed glad, for it was Eastertide; the hedges were ready to burst with blossom, and Nature herself rejoiced.

No one seemed as sad and as sorry, as leaden-footed and down-hearted as himself, for the shepherds whistled as they tended their flocks, the women smiled as they stood at their cottage doors, and up and down the grassy hillsides the girls and boys were bowling hard-boiled many-coloured Easter-eggs; and as Willie looked upon them he grew sadder and more regretful still.

Once, indeed, he accepted an invitation to have a game of play with them, and sent his pretty pink and green egg rolling right down the slope of the hill, but when it reached the bottom it fell into a furze bush, and when one of the children exclaimed, "Where's thy egg gone, little Green Jacket? Hast thou found it?" he all at once remembered the black-faced sheep, and wondered if that would ever be found; and all the gay-coloured eggs seemed to turn to a dull, dingy tint, the blue sky grew grey, and the grass looked no longer green; he remembered that his legs ached, he remembered that he was hungry; in short, in remembering

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his one great trouble he remembered all his smaller ones.

So he took up his little stick and wandered on once more, thinking that none of those merry children had lost a necktie, a gander, and a black-faced sheep all within the space of one short, quickly-fleeting, little month.

By and bye, the roads and lanes grew very quiet, for the morning had passed into noontide, and all the children had gone home to their dinners; didn't Willie just wish that he also could have gone home to his?

Home, why the very word held sweetness in it, as the cup of a flower holds sugar for the bee; and yet he felt—poor timid little fellow—that he could *not* return without the presence and support of his father, and, worst of all, without the black-faced sheep.

And a kindly woman at a wayside farm-house looked with compassion on the forlorn little figure, and brought him a mug of milk; and as he returned it empty with his little word of thanks, he thought of his own China mug which his dear dead mother had given him; for this one was like it, only his had a robin on it, whilst this had a bunch of flowers; and he turned his head on one side, so that the kind stranger should not see his face, but she did all the same. She noticed the tear marks on his cheek, she noticed the dust on his dark green jacket, and said, "There, my lad, you're tired, I'm thinking; going to the Fair, I suppose; but you seem as if you want

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someone to tidy you up a bit—you want mother now, don't you ?"

"That I do," he replied, as he turned away from the cottage with its neat little garden, so bright and gay with its crimson and white daisy borders, so sweet and fragrant with its bushes of southernwood, and went once more upon his way, feeling that he did indeed want a great many things.

In the first place he wanted his mother, not another child's mother, but the low-voiced gentle woman who slept in the bleak moorland Churchyard. Yes, he wanted his own dear, never to be forgotten mother; he wanted to tell her all about the black-faced sheep—the sheep that had spoilt his birthday; he wanted *her*, and her alone, to tuck him up in his little bed, her cool hand to be gently placed upon his aching brow.

In the next place he was timid, and he wanted his father—the sturdy farmer—to lean upon; and, lastly, being only a boy, he wanted some kind of dinner, and as he thought how much he wanted it, he came upon a gipsy encampment, and beheld them cooking their dinner. Yes, it was stewing in a camp kettle, or three-legged iron pot, on the top of a large wood fire; an old woman with a scarlet handkerchief thrown over her head and tied under the chin was minding it; the dark-eyed women of the tribe were nursing their babies and watching it; the

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children were playing round it, and the men, who lounged about in shabby velveteen shooting coats with their hands in their pockets, were also keeping an eye upon it; dinner was evidently a fact to the gipsies, romantic though they looked.

And when little Bo-Peep came upon them unexpectedly, he felt frightened, and, in spite of the dinner, wanted to run right away, for quick bright eyes looked angrily at him, the women chattered, and their husbands frowned; but escape just then was clearly impossible, so he took refuge in that last resource of the timid—he did nothing.

"What would you like, little house-dweller?" said the old woman who minded the pot, as she walked up to him; "would you like to rest for a while; would you like to share the *Z*incali's (gipsy's) fare?"

"Thank you," he meekly replied, and sat down just outside the circle near a large red and yellow van, and he soon grew so sleepy (for grief closes the eyelids sooner than joy) that he laid his head on a step of the ladder which led up into the van, and soon fell fast asleep; and in his dreams he sat with his father and mother at the farm-house table, and was a very happy Bo-Peep, for the lamb had returned, the gander was living, and his Sunday necktie was around his neck.

But, alas! he awoke with a start, and before he had time to fully recollect how and why he came to be there,

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he heard voices speaking on the other side of the van, and one of them—a very hoarse one—said, "Which road will he come, think you?"

"Why, the Alnwick road's the only one that leads to Hollyhock Farm, and down that road he's bound to go," replied the other.

"And you're certain sure that he *has* sold the heifers, and that he'll bring the money straight home in his pocket?"

"Yes, it's right enough; for I heard him tell a friend of his that he was thankful he'd sold the animals 'cos he'd got to meet the rent."

"Well, that'll do so far, and what kind of looking man is he?"

"Oh, as for that, he's like dozens of other farmers; you might as well try to pick out one sixpence from dozens of other sixpences; but I shall be with you, I'll point him out, and we'll send him home with his pockets lightened, at any rate."

Then there was silence. Willie sat silent also, and wondered of whom they could be speaking. Suddenly it flashed upon his mind that it must be his father whom they were planning how to despoil and rob, whom they thought of sending home an all but ruined man.

Oh, it could be no other than his father, for did not the man mention Hollyhock Farm? Yes, there was no mistake, it must be Farmer Graham.

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Willie felt there was no time to lose; the afternoon was even now beginning to pass into twilight; he must hasten away.

"What, what can I do?" thought the boy. Oh, if only his own little Willie could save him, how happy, how thankful he would be. But how? God would help him if he asked Him. Had not his mother told him always to ask God's help in everything? So, clasping his hands, he said earnestly to himself, "Our Father, which art in Heaven, help me to save my father." Then, hearing the voices again, he listened with all his ears.

"And how do you mean to do the job?"

"Why, you and I can walk along the road by and bye, just make our way to a likely turn in the lane where it's narrow and dark, and wait there till our man comes past."

Without further hesitation Willie took up his stick and prepared to take his leave, but the gipsies were not at all willing that he should depart so easily.

"Hullo, young master," said one of the men. "Where have you been?"

"I've been asleep here, on the step," said Willie, feeling dreadfully frightened lest they should hinder him.

"And don't you want your dinner?" asked the old woman.

"I'm not hungry now," said the boy; "thank you all the same."

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"Not in such haste, young stranger, not in such haste," said an evil-looking man with a scarred face. "Even if we *do* let you go, you must leave that pretty green jacket behind to remember you by."

Leave them his pretty green jacket, his father's birthday present, that dear kind parent, whom this very band had been conspiring to despoil. No, never; he could not dream of such a thing, and so he told them.

"I can't do that," he said; "it's my birthday gift, and quite new. Why, I only wore it for the first time this morning. No, I'll never do that, never."

"I think you will," said the cross-looking man, slowly and calmly, "I think you will. As for its being a birthday present, why one of *our* lads can wear it on their birthday; and as for its being new, why that's all the better; we don't want old clothes when we can get new. Come, off with it, quick, or I shall have to help you."

And as Willie refused to pull it off, the gipsy went up to him, and, in spite of his struggles, stripped it off his back as easily as one peels a ripe orange.

Then he gruffly said, "You can go now, if you like."

And, with the tears thickly gathering in his eyes, the lad went, slowly at first lest the gipsies should suspect his purpose, then, with hurrying feet and anxious spirit, he hastened on at his utmost speed to warn the farmer of the evil fate intended for him.

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And at last he came to the Alnwick Road, where was an old deserted quarry, on whose edge he sat down, with a throbbing heart, and waited for his father.

Waited until the well-known, well-loved figure, in its suit of dark grey tweed, should approach that other forforn, forsaken-looking figure, and be welcomed, warned, and saved.

And the twilight deepened, and the night dews fell, and the north wind rose and pierced like a cutting whip through Willie's shirt, and every now and then an owl in the wood hard by called, dolefully, "Too-whit, too-whoo."

And away in the distance the lights of Alnwick glimmered and twinkled like little stars, and the turrets of Alnwick Castle were faintly seen by the pale still light of the moon.

"I'm very frightened," said Willie, "for there seems nothing around me but darkness and stone." Stones on his right, stones on his left and beneath him; the great, deep quarry all jagged with stone.

"I mustn't get giddy," he said, to himself, "or I sha'n't see father. I shall fall to the bottom of the quarry, and then they will rob and, perhaps, kill him, and what would stepmother and Gertie do?"

Yes, little Bo-Peep, what would they do if his arm-chair stood empty in the corner—if his place were unfilled at the board, if the home of which he was the support and stay knew him no more?

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But even as he asked himself this question someone came slowly and wearily down the long and winding road; someone who leant heavily on a stout gnarled ashen stick, someone whom Willie knew, oh! so well—whom he ran to meet with deepest thankfulness and a cry of "Oh! Father! Father! I've lost the gander, I've lost the sheep, I've lost my dear little jacket; but I've found you, I haven't lost *you!*"

"Why, Willie!" replied his wondering father, "how came thou here? You've found me, sure enough; but what can have made thee come all this way to seek me?"

Then, with many pauses, and in broken sentences, Willie told his tale, but when he had ended it the farmer took his shepherd's plaid from his own shoulders and wrapped it carefully around his son, saying,

"Thou'rt cold in thy waistcoat, bairn; we must buy thee another jacket."

And he took him into the neat little town and bought him another green jacket, exactly like the one he had lost, and little Bo-Peep felt like to greet this time for very joy and thankfulness; and a friend to whom the farmer told his tale said,

"Well, Graham, we'll put to the horse and drive down the road till you're within hail of your own people."

And just past the junction of the two cross roads, where some large trees shaded the narrow path, they could dimly

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see two dark figures crouched under the hedge—two slouching figures who turned and ran into the open fields when they saw approaching the horse and cart, instead of the solitary man for whom they were waiting.

"Eh!" said Mr. Byers, shaking his fist after the would-be robbers, "but I would have liked well to come up with them and let them feel the weight of my hunting crop here."

But Thomas Graham pressed Willie's hand in his, and whispered, as softly and as tenderly as the boy's mother could have done,

"But for thee, lad, where might thy father have been to-night?"

Ay, and when he sat in his own arm-chair in the chimney corner that evening, with the money deposited in the bank on the dresser, and himself all safe and snug by his hearth, to whom do you think was Mrs. Graham's warmest and cheeriest welcome given, to whom did she speak most gently, towards whom did her eye most frequently turn? Why, her kindliest words, her softest glances, her heartiest greetings, were all for little Bo-Peep, for Willie, her timid young step-son; for the boy who had once lost his necktie, but had now saved the homestead; had once lost a gander, but had now saved the rent money; had lately lost a sheep, but to-night had saved his father.

And when Willie said, earnestly, "Mother, I'm sorry

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about the black-faced sheep; I'll be careful and not lose another," she only replied,

"Rest quiet, dear laddie. We'll hope you'll have no more losses; but, if you do, why, we'll share in the loss, and only go and search for it both together. *Remember what you have found to-night!*"

"There, my dear, that is grandfather's little story," said the old gentleman, when he had concluded.

"You are fond of riddles, Willie. Guess this if you can. Who *was* that little boy? Can you guess?"

"Indeed I can!" said Willie. "It must have been yourself, grandfather; because your name is the same as mine, you know; and I know you came from Northumberland. But tell me, please, did you *never* find the black-faced sheep?"

"Never! It must have dropped down a cliff and been lost, for we never saw it again; but I've kept the little green jacket my father bought me at Alnwick with which to replace the one the gipsies stole from me, and I will show it to you if you like. I keep it to remind me of other days, and look at it whenever I want to recall them. I looked at it when I became a rich man. I looked at it when they made me Governor of Queensland. For the herb Humility is wrapped up in that poor little garment, my boy."

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Grandfather paused, and looked at his wife.

"Yes," said the old lady, "I will tell you a story of England, Willie—a story of when I was young—and I will call it

GRACE SHERBORNE'S CUPBOARD.

"Many happy returns of the day, my darling, and a merry Christmas as well," said my father, Ralph Sherborne, of Sherborne Manor, in Warwickshire, as he kissed me on Christmas morning.

"And may each birthday be happier, each Christmas be merrier," said my dear and gentle mother, as she, too, gave me a kiss.

"Tell us, what did you think of your birthday presents this morning when you awoke, my Stella?"

"I thought nothing at all, mamma," I replied, "just because I was too pleased and surprised to think! I could only look at them and guess who gave me the book and the frock."

"Who, but your father, could have given the book? And who, but myself, the frock?" she replied, with a smile; "for we know you love books, and I thought you would like a dress just like little Grace Sherborne's better than anything else. But hark how the bells are pealing; look at the depth of the snow!"

Yes, the bells were indeed ringing merrily, and the snow

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was indeed falling quickly, in the old-fashioned village of Marton, on that never to be forgotten Christmas and birthday morning, so long, ay! so many, many years ago!

You are a little Australian boy, my Willie, and have never, as yet, seen England; but some day in the future you will see it. More, you will go and see Uncle Everard and visit your grandmother's never forgotten beautiful old-fashioned home; and I should like you to see it as I saw it on the day of which I am speaking, when the icicles hung from the gables; the quaint old gardens were covered with snow, and the fish-pond was frozen over. I thought it was lovely in summer time, when the roses bloomed in the lanes, and the tall, white lilies showed white and fair in our garden—the garden which my mother had named "The Home of the Lilies," because they grew there in such lavish profusion; but I thought, and still think, that it was lovelier still in the winter.

We Sherbornes were an old family, but poor; poor because, years ago, when George III. was King, one of our family had spent too freely; a fault for which we, his successors, paid by losing farm after farm, by felling tree after tree. Of course, I did not know this on that Christmas birthday morning, for I was only ten years old. I only knew it when I came to womanhood. But, child as I was, I knew there was something amiss—I knew it by my father's frequent sighs, by my mother's grave face.

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And, as I was an only daughter, and always at home with my parents, I grew strangely thoughtful for my age; for children like yourself, Willie, who have plenty of little brothers and sisters, cannot imagine what it is to have no one to play with; and I had no one, for my only brother, who was older than myself, was generally away at school.

So I used to steal into the Picture Gallery and talk by the hour together to a portrait, by Vandyck, of little Grace Sherborne, who died in the reign of King Charles I., and I used to call her "My Little Sister!" What though she never answered when I told her my childish secrets, never condoled with me in my childish sorrows, she always smiled down on me from her gilded frame with her beautiful, innocent smile. She always seemed to be looking upon me with her dark, pathetic eyes, and I was quite contented, for I knew that my little sister would have loved me if she could.

When you go to Sherborne, Willie, you must remember grandmamma's story, and look for my little Grace. You will find her portrait under the painted window, between that of Rupert Sherborne, Knight, her father, and Estella, his bright-faced Spanish wife, after whom I was named; and you must not forget to visit the ancient Chantry of S. John's and see my little sister's tomb—her little tomb, whereon she is sculptured with small white hands of

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marble, calmly folded on her breast; her little tomb, whereon two sculptured angels hold the marble pillow on which her childish head is resting, and a lamb lies meekly couchant at her little upturned feet.

But to resume my story. On my birthday morning my very first visit was, as a matter of course, paid to my dear little Grace, and I had a very special reason indeed for wanting to look at her likeness that morning, for I wore my mother's gift, a dress, actually copied from the beautiful portrait, and I naturally wanted to compare myself with the original. So I passed down the long oak-panelled gallery, and gave my ancestors a Christmas greeting on my way to the likeness of little Grace.

I said, "Good morning, Sir Admiral," to Peregrine Sherborne, the famous sea captain, who had sailed with Raleigh and Drake, who had made the family—so my father told me—by his store of Indian silver and Spanish gold; and the blue eyes of the adventurous seaman—who looked so brave in his orange and black satin doublet, so foreign with his small black hat and pearl rings in his ears—seemed to smile back at me, and say, "Good morning, my little maiden. I wish that I could present you to Elizabeth, our Maiden Queen." I greeted Chief Justice Sherborne, the man who gave a piece of land to twenty poor widows. I greeted, with a curtsy, Sir Lionel, who died for his king at the battle of Marston Moor; and then

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I curtsied to little Grace, who died when she was only ten years old; just before Marston Moor, so the motherless maiden never lived to be fatherless too.

"Now, my dear little sister," I said, "Do I in any way resemble you, for I should so like to?" and I looked again at the picture, as though I had never seen it before. There she stood in her childish beauty, with the white moss roses drooping in her hands, her brown locks shading her white brow, her long curls falling on her dark velvet dress.

"Little Grace Sherborne," I said, "I've no one to whom to show my picture book. I've no one at all, save my kitty, to play with. If you were living this Christmas wouldn't you come and play with me? See, I have brought you a wreath of holly, which I gathered and twisted for you myself," and as I spoke I took the wreath which I held in my hand, and climbing up on an old oak chair, tried to attach it to the top of the gilded frame; in my efforts to secure it safely the portrait trembled and seemed to turn as on a pivot, and on looking down I saw a hole in the panelled wall—or rather a kind of dark and dusty china closet—which I immediately mentally named, "Little Grace Sherborne's Cupboard," and determined to fetch papa.

No sooner thought of than done. I jumped off the chair, I flew down the gallery, and scampered down the broad oak staircase at quite three stairs at a time!

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"Papa, where are you? Papa," I said. And when I heard him reply, "Here, Stella, in the library," I burst open the door and ran in.

"What's the matter, child?" asked my father. "Are you ill, have you fallen downstairs, or what is it? You seem strangely excited."

"Oh, I am, indeed, indeed, Papa, for I've really, actually, truly, found Little Grace Sherborne's Cupboard."

"Little Grace Sherborne," repeated my father, "Why, Stella, all that you do, all that you think of, doubtless all that you dream of, seems connected with Little Grace Sherborne. Is it because you have been rocked in her cradle, I wonder?" and he smiled.

Now, I ought to tell you, Willie, that amongst the Sherborne treasures was a quaintly-carved oaken cradle, which tradition said was Grace Sherborne's, and I believe that it was, for her Spanish mother's name and arms were carved in the wood at the back; but however this might be, we Sherbornes, when we were babies, always slept and wailed, and laughed and cooed, in that same cumbrous cradle for generation after generation.

"Do come, papa," I exclaimed; "let us go *now* and see what there is in that cupboard."

"What a foolish, impatient child it is!" he said, pleasantly, as he followed me down the hall, and we passed together down the gallery, and stood in front of

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the picture, which only appeared to be the same as ever, for it had fallen back into its old position.

"Jump on the chair again, Stella," said my father, "and touch the holly wreath as you touched it before," and as I did so the painting turned round on a pivot exactly as it had done when I moved it first.

"Now we shall see what it contains," said my father. "After all these years. our hiding place, our secret hole in the wall, which report says has always existed, must deliver up its secrets. You and I will see what they are, little Stella," and with great curiosity I watched him remove the picture from its place, unfasten the door in the panel, and enter the dusty closet, whilst I waited outside, and my Persian kitten, Flossy, who had followed me upstairs, jumped on my shoulder, rubbed my cheek with her fur, poked her splendid bushy tail into my eyes, and purred like a little tea-kettle when it is just beginning to boil.

"Will you be long, papa; won't you please come out, or let me come in to you?" I enquired, and as I spoke my father came out, bearing a silver casket in one hand and a little book in the other.

"Look here, dear child, this is Grace Sherborne's Prayer Book," he said, and he put a small, velvet-covered volume into my outstretched hand.

Yes, it was indeed her book; the hands which held

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those white moss roses had held this little book; those eyes which drooped so thoughtfully beneath their silken lashes, had gazed upon its printed pages! It was indeed her Prayer Book, for written on the fly-leaf, in faded, unformed characters, were the words, "Grace Sherborne: Given to her by her deare father on her ninth birthdaye."

(I have the book by me now, Willie, and there are spikes of lavender in every other page—lavender gathered from my mother's bush in the Manor garden.)

"See," said my father, and he showed me a locked silver casket, on which our arms were finely chased, with our motto, "Omnia Vanitas" (all is vanity), underneath.

"This proves that it was indeed intended for us," he continued, and as he spoke he glanced at the deeply-tinted, richly-dyed, painted window, where "Omnia Vanitas" shone forth in English and Latin, in letters of purple and gold.

For, as you know, Willie, this was our curiously mournful motto, chosen, I believe, by the great sea captain, who had sailed round the world, had fought against the Armada, and lastly—crowning honour of a life that was filled with honours—had, in his own house at Marton, entertained his Queen.

So when my father took me with him into the library, before he prized open the lid of the coffer, he murmured, under his breath, "Omnia Vanitas."

I knew that he hoped for something for which he almost

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dreaded *to* hope, lest grief should follow high expectation.

But when the lid was forced open he found a treasure indeed. There was store of gold, and store of silver, and store of jewels, including Elizabeth's present to Peregrine Sherborne — the famous pearl and ruby brooch. Yes, there it lay! The brooch which was so often mentioned in family records, which the Queen had herself bestowed on Rosalind, Peregrine's wife. And as I held it up to the light the rubies with which it was enriched shone and glittered and sparkled like spots of fire; and twisted round the brooch was a small, discoloured letter, which my father read aloud, as follows—

"I go to serve the king, to gain with glory or to die with honour; and if I die, I pray the good Lord that I may meete my little daughter Grace. I hide this treasure behind her portrait because the times are evil. Old Anthony, my trusty servant, goes with me—he knows the secret; if he returns, he will confide it to safe hands. Fare ye well. — Rupert Sherborne, to his Cousin Philip, whom may Christe have in His keeping."

"So this," said my father, gravely but gladly, "is the secret of little Grace Sherborne's cupboard. My darling, let us be thankful. I wonder what your mother will say when she returns from her walk."

And I wondered what she would say also, but, to my utter astonishment, she only said one single word. She

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simply walked up to my father, placed her hand on his arm, and said, "Ralph;" and my amazement was greater still when he seemed to fully understand all she meant, and said, "Celia," nothing more, only "Celia." I thought that had I been they I should have had so much to say that I should have taken hours to say it. But in years to come I knew that their hearts were too full for speech, and well it might be so.

Ah, little Willie, well it might be thus, for when I found the hidden treasure on that ever-blessed Christmas Day, that ever-memorable birthday of mine, Sherborne Manor, the home of our family for hundreds of years, was saved, for ere another Christmas Day it would have been sold to a stranger.

Yes, though my parents had struggled bravely, had fought as few *could* have fought to preserve the old ancestral home, they had, alas, been worsted in the struggle, and defeat had been certain save for my fortunate discovery.

"Stella, my child," said my mother, on the morning which followed the finding of the treasure, "I gave you what I meant for a surprise in the shape of your birthday dress, but you gave us a still greater one—so suppose we call the treasure 'Stella's Surprise?'"

"No, mamma dear," I replied, "please don't do that. Little Grace Sherborne kept it safely behind her picture through all these years, and I shall always keep a wreath

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of flowers above her, for if I hadn't put a wreath of holly on her portrait we could never have found out the secret. Please let us calls it 'Little Grace Sherborne's Surprise.'"

"Yes," said my father, "let's name it after the pretty child of long ago, who lived her life, enjoyed her birthdays, wept and smiled, played and was glad, sang and was merry before the battle of Marston Moor."

"The story is finished," said grandmother, quietly; "I must say Finis, Willie, as my little sister said so long ago to her earthly life."

"Thank you, grandmamma dear," replied Willie. "But when I am a man I will go over to England, and visit Sherborne Manor, in Warwickshire; and I'll tell you what I will do: I'll gather some beautiful English flowers (for I mean to go in the summer time), and I'll make a wreath for Grace Sherborne's picture, and I'll fill her little cold hands, her pretty marble hands, with flowers as she lies asleep on her little tomb; and I'll go, if I can, on my birthday, grandmother, for I want to think how the sweet little maiden kept Sherborne Manor for your friends and you."

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A Birthday in a Clock.

BY HELEN A. WILMOT-BUXTON.

I AM going to tell you about the old white Palace where the little Princess lived. It was a grand old Palace, and stood in the midst of a garden full of all sorts of trees, and so large and straggling that I had never reached the end of it.

I had heard all manner of stories about the Palace and the wonderful things which the Grand Duke had collected in his museum—the biggest clock that had ever been made; the chairs which, when you sat upon them, played tunes, and many other marvels besides. So, of course, I was very much interested, and was never tired of wandering about the garden.

I thought, too, I might, perhaps, catch sight of the Grand Duke's little daughter, the young Princess, whose

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portrait I had seen, so I never lost an opportunity of lingering a few moments in front of the windows where the sun-dial was. People told me the Grand Duchess was hardly ever in the Palace, because it was so dull, therefore I should never see the Princess; but I did not believe them, and thought they only said it to keep me out of the garden.

Well, in the evening, on my ninth birthday, I was sent by my grandmother to post a letter, and was on the way home, when a sudden thought came into my head, and I turned into the Palace garden. It was a beautiful summer evening, and I had never seen the place by moonlight, so I determined just to have one run up and down the terrace before going home. I ran once round the Palace, and saw how beautiful the garden looked, bathed in the silver moonlight, and lingered before the sun-dial to have a peep in at the windows. It was usually very dark within the Palace at this time; but this evening, all the blinds were up, and I saw that the chandeliers were brilliantly illuminated.

I wished I might stay longer, but it was getting late, so I ran back across the grass to the gate. What was my consternation to find it was closed—and not only closed, but locked and chained! It was made of iron, and the walls were far too high to climb.

I was frightened at first. Was I to spend the whole

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night in the garden? The thought filled me with dismay, but only for a moment. I felt exhilarated and excited the next, for what an adventure it would be! and what a fine story I should have to tell my friends when I got home!

No, I would not be frightened—that would spoil all! So I turned away, directing my steps towards the shrubbery, where I remembered having seen another gate. This, after some difficulty, I found, but it was locked and chained like the other.

In spite of all my efforts not to be frightened, this discovery rather daunted me, and I did not feel altogether at my ease as I slowly retraced my steps through the dark paths overshadowed by the thickly-growing trees.

I came out into the open again at length, not much the worse for my many tumbles, and saw once more the pretty zig-zag paths and sloping lawns, lighted up by the moon.

But, alas! the very next thing I did was to lose myself, which in this Palace garden was quite easy to do. The trees clustered so near, and their boughs grew so thick, and the zig-zag paths twisted and turned in all directions, and were so much alike, that it was next to impossible to distinguish one from another.

Presently I came to a part I had never seen before. It was very pretty, and the trees were hung with coloured lanterns. I walked down a long sloping avenue, with banks of moss and fern on each side, the moonlight

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filtering down upon me through the tiny loop-holes in the leaves, and it was all so lovely that I have never since forgotten it.

I soon forgot everything else in my curiosity to see where the path would lead me, when suddenly I came to a green bank which sloped down to a beautiful lake. In the middle of the water was an island, and all round it, floating upon the surface of the lake, were yellow and white water-lilies. I stood chained to the spot ; for never, not even in my dreams, had I ever seen anything so beautiful. The stream glittered for all the world like silver, and a boat rocked at anchor just within reach.

I never could see a boat without longing to get into it ; so I jumped in and took possession, making up my mind to pass the night in it. But *that* was not to be. I had not been long in the boat when all at once I saw a little boy coming towards me. When he caught sight of me, he stopped abruptly, then when I beckoned to him, ran up to the boat and stared at me just as if he had never in all his life seen a little girl before. He was a nice-looking boy, and I hastened to tell him my story, thinking he would help me. I spoke in German, of course, because I knew at once that he was not English by his look. We soon became friends, and I thought him a very polite, well-behaved little boy, because he gathered me some water-lilies, and rowed me to the island. He did not

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always understand my German, but that did not matter, for I generally contrived to understand him.

There was a tiny wooden hut on the island, and it was furnished and carpeted, and belonged to the little Princess. It was full of beautiful toys.

The boy told me that there was to be a large party at the Palace to-night, and that was the reason the gates were closed so early. He told me, too, that no one was allowed in the gardens now because the Grand Duke was at home, and that trespassers would be punished. This frightened me, and I nearly cried; but, remembering that I was English, I quickly smothered my tears, lest the German little boy should think the English were cowards.

"I don't believe Queen Victoria would let the Grand Duke or anyone else hurt me," I said. "I am *English*, you know."

The little boy said he did not know about that, but whether or not, no one should hurt me when he was with me, which I thought very kind.

Then he told me about the wonderful museum, and the clock which he said was the biggest in the world, and was an organ and a clock together, and it was so interesting that I forgot all about going home.

"How I wish I could get into the Palace, and see the Princess and the wonderful museum, and especially the clock," I said.

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The little boy seemed to be thinking.

"Couldn't we?" I said, half wondering at my own daring.

"*I* am going; I have been invited," the boy answered.

"Then why can't you take me and hide me somewhere?" I suggested.

The boy laughed.

"Perhaps I might," he said; "but look here, little Fräulein, you must not betray me if you're found out."

"The English never betray their friends," I answered, loftily.

And he said that under those circumstances he would certainly help me.

Then we made our plans. The boy rowed me back to the island where the Princess kept some of her clothes, and I dressed myself up in a white pelisse and Indian scarf, and I expect I looked very like a real princess—I felt like one.

The little boy told me then what I was to do, and that I was to be particularly on my guard against an old gentleman with long grey moustaches, and a lady with a turban and a walking-stick.

"If you are seen by accident, people who do not know the Princess will take you for her," the boy told me. "You are not very unlike her;" so you see I must have something royal about me.

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The boy then guided me to the Palace, and when no one was by we ran up stairs. I felt less like a princess then, for I was ashamed of stealing up the back stairs like a thief, and my legs began to tremble. But my companion bade me be courageous, so I tried not to let him know how horribly afraid I was.

"They are all dressing and preparing for the ball," he said, conducting me into a suite of magnificent drawing-rooms, furnished very grandly, and brilliantly illuminated. "If you would like to see the dancing, there is no safer and better hiding-place for you than over there in the conservatory, behind the palms," he said.

"But—but—but suppose I'm found out," I stammered, almost sorry I had come.

"Oh, you won't be if you keep quiet," he said. "Later on, when everyone is at supper, I'll come for you, and after showing you over the museum you shall escape; only, whatever you do, don't come out from your hiding-place."

I promised to be careful, and after seeing that I was completely hidden by the palms he left me.

I was very snug, had plenty to amuse me, and never expected to be found out.

Before long people began to saunter into the drawing-rooms—ladies in rich gowns, and gentlemen in military dress, looking very grand. Then the music struck up, and

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I crawled out a little way just to see what was going on. I never saw anything so beautiful as the dancing, and I longed to joined the dancers, but, of course, I was not so silly.

After a time I crawled back, because an old gentleman with long white moustaches would come poking about among the plants in the conservatory, and I was frightened to death of him. He was a soldier, and carried a long sword, which clattered fearfully whenever he moved, and he looked horribly fierce, so no wonder I was afraid of him. He seemed particularly interested in the palms behind which I was crouching, and made me tremble so violently that I shook the myrtle near me. He stooped down close to me, and I turned cold.

Then he deliberately pulled aside the palm leaves, disclosing me to full view. I quaked in every limb. I was afraid to move. He gave me his hand and pulled me out. I was too terrified to look at him. My first impulse was to fling myself at his feet and beg for mercy. I thought he would tell the Grand Duke and send me to prison, but at last I managed to summon up courage to look at him.

He was smiling; but there was a horrible glitter in his sharp black eyes, and I shrank from him with renewed terror. He was talking all the time—scolding, I expect—but I could not understand a word of what he said, because I was so frightened.

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After about five minutes, it suddenly dawned upon my mind that perhaps he took me for the Princess, and this thought set me at rest.

The General, for that is what I called him to myself, had not been scolding after all, but only chatting. I concocted a little plan then, with the object of getting rid of him, but was afraid to speak lest my German should betray me, so after all I had to leave it to chance.

The General took me to a seat among some lovely flowers, and said that he would go and fetch me an ice, and then he left me.

Oh! how glad I was to see his back, and how eagerly I looked for some means to escape.

Luckily for me, there was a side door leading from the conservatory, and I opened it, hoping that it would land me in the garden, but no such good fortune—it led into a small ante-room. It was beautifully furnished with carved furniture, among which I noticed a great chest.

I was looking for a hiding-place, when I heard footsteps on the stairs. It was the General. I did not hesitate a second, but, opening the chest, jumped in and closed the lid. What a mercy it was big enough to hold me!

About ten minutes after, the room door was opened, and I heard the heavy tread of the General. He was looking for me. I held my breath, trembling. I heard him set something down upon the table, and leave the room.

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After that all was still. I thought I might as well peep out and take a little breath. I raised the lid. There was no one there, and the door was shut. There were a plate and a jelly-glass upon the table, and I was hungry. I left the chest, hastily tasted the jelly—it was delicious. I swallowed it all up. The frosted cake followed, and I was only just in time to jump back into the chest when the room door was once more thrust open, and in came the General again. It seemed that he had found the real Princess this time, and had no doubt told her about me.

What an awful position I was in, and whatever would happen if they found me.

The General told the Princess he had brought her some refreshments, and took her to the table, where, of course, they only found the empty glass and plate. The General cried out in surprise, and was no doubt very angry. The Princess only laughed. They went back to the conservatory then, and I was just making up my mind to escape when two other people came in, and actually sat down upon the chest in which I was crouching. Luckily they soon got up, and when I heard their retreating footsteps I cautiously peeped forth from my place of concealment.

All was now safe, so I ventured to leave the chest, and succeeded in reaching the staircase. I had descended as far as the first landing when, as ill-luck would have it, who should be coming up but the dreadful old General,

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who had been haunting me the whole evening, and from whom it seemed impossible to escape.

I was filled with dismay.

He recognised me at once, and I saw that there was not a minute to lose, so, summoning up all my resolution, I fled upstairs, the way I had come down, but instead of turning into the room where the chest was, I went on.

I never ran so fast in my life, but for all that, my pursuer seemed to be gaining upon me every instant. I saw then that my only chance was to turn and double like a hare. If I had not been so frightened I should have enjoyed the fun; as it was, I was in dire fear of being caught and punished.

The Palace was so large, and the corridors and passages so long and winding, that I managed to do this very well, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing my enemy take the wrong turn.

I paused to take breath and look about me. Chance had guided me to the famous museum, of which I had heard so much, and I could not resist yielding to my desire to see it. Of course, I was very much hurried and too uneasy to enjoy it; but I managed to find out the wonderful clock, notwithstanding. I was a little disappointed in it, too, for though very large, it looked much the same as other clocks, only it had no face, and the works were gone, the case alone remaining.

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I began to feel hungry and thirsty after my chase, and was glad to find a cup of coffee and some cake upon one of the glass cases. These I partook of, and much enjoyed. Thus refreshed, I grew bolder, and began to look about me. There were many curious things—stuffed monkeys and bears and birds in cases. Then there was an ancient chariot.

I had heard that the owner of the museum was a very eccentric old gentleman, and had collected all manner of queer things, and among them I had been told there were chairs which, when you sat upon them, played music.

I longed to try just to see if such a funny thing was possible.

Forgetting my danger, I sat down in a large arm-chair, and to my surprise and delight, I had no sooner done so than the museum seemed to be full of music.

I was enjoying it, wondering how it was managed, when to my astonishment, the chair next to me began playing, too.

Then for the first time, I began to realize what I had done.

Only suppose all the other chairs began to play, what a noise they would make! Why, everyone in the house would hear, and come rushing up to see what was the matter.

I sprang to my feet, hoping that the music would cease,

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but I suppose the thing had been made to play a certain number of tunes straight off; for in spite of throwing it down and patting it all over, it went on louder than ever.

I caught sight of a rope then, hanging, as I thought, from the ceiling, and, imagining that if I pulled it the music would leave off, I began to tug at it with all my might.

But, oh! horror! I had hardly touched it before I was almost deafened by the ringing of bells. I noticed then what I had not before seen—a long row of bells all round the room, all of which, to my consternation, were now set in vibration, each one starting the next.

I was almost deafened; but it was not *that* I minded.

It was something much worse. The whole Palace was in commotion! The dance music had ceased, and everyone was rushing upstairs. Whatever should I do!

There were no chests, no cupboards wherein to hide—nothing but the empty clock-case.

I did not hesitate a second.

Someone was on the threshold, and there was not a moment to be lost. I opened the clock-case and got in!

I was safe!

The next minute, the museum was thronged with people.

Everyone was talking at once, and all were asking whatever had set the bells off.

I heard all and trembled.

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Luckily, no one thought of the clock. They seemed to imagine thieves had broken in, whom, no doubt, the bells had been put up to keep away, for the least thing set them in motion, although it took a great deal to quiet them, as I knew to my cost.

There was a good deal of laughing then, and the people gradually dispersed.

The General still lingered, however, peeping about among the furniture. He left off at last, and then I heard him tell a friend he had left a cup of coffee and some cake on one of the cases, and that someone had taken them. He seemed very angry, and I trembled when he said the same thing had occurred once before that evening. I could not but congratulate myself that I was safe from his vengeance.

Then another dreadful thing happened, how I can't at all explain. I moved in the case because I was getting cramped, and, to my horror, if the horrible clock did not begin to play, and with such maddening brilliancy that everyone came to listen. They all tried to open it, but no one succeeded. I rejoiced, little realizing my position.

Many hours passed thus, and I thought the people would never go ; but they did at last, and I was left alone. The clock had left off playing, too, so I could hear better what was going on. All was quite still, and I ventured to feel for the spring, which I pressed, believing,

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of course, that the door would open, but it resisted all my efforts. Here was a new danger, and a worse one! I cannot describe my feelings. For the first time I realized my awful position, and burst into a torrent of tears. My wild efforts to open the door had set off the dreadful music again!

I kicked and stamped and shouted, but all in vain. The people were dispersing, and I heard the slamming of carriage doors and the sound of horses' hoofs upon the gravel drive. Presently someone came in to shut up and extinguish the lamps. It was an old woman, and she was talking to herself.

"The clock is bewitched," she said. "I always thought it was, and now I know it!"

"Let me out, please, ma'am!" I cried.

I suppose she was deaf, for she did not hear me till I shouted; then she said,

"Well, if I didn't think someone spoke!"

I stood on tip-toe, and by so doing managed to bring my eyes on a level with the glass, so that I could see what was going on. The old woman had extinguished the lamps on the other side of the room, and was now leisurely putting out the others.

Her back was towards me.

If only she would turn and see me looking at her through the clock!

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"And it seemed to come from the clock, too," said the old woman.

"So it does!" I cried; "I—I am in the clock, and I can't get out!"

"Gracious goodness!" cried the old woman; "if the clock is not speaking!"

She turned in frightened surprise, and saw me looking at her.

Then, with a perfect yell of horror, she fled, dropping her candle, and uttering cry upon cry, till my voice was entirely drowned.

I had become desperate by this time, and with a last wild effort I banged myself against the door. The sudden force of my whole body wrenched it open, and I fell forward upon the ground. Springing quickly to my feet, I rushed from the museum, running like a hunted hare, and finding escape through an open window in one of the lower rooms, where the servants were preparing for to-morrow's breakfast.

I expect they were rather surprised, but I did not stop to ask them.

Happily for me, I found a gardener to let me out, and I ran straight home; nor did I ever venture to go to the Palace garden again!

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A Birthday Spent in a Coal Mine.

BY FRANCES CLARE.

MANY years ago, when I was a little boy in round jackets and turn-down collars, I lived with my parents just outside a mining village, which I will call Dunford, in the County of Durham; and my father was the Manager of one of the largest pits, which was locally known as the Charity Mine.

Dunford was indeed a black little place, for everything in it, about it, and around it, seemed, as my father most truly said, of the coal—coaly.

But though it was dark, though it was dull and dismal-looking and dingy, the poor little village was not wholly a miserable place, for even there the miners' gardens were gay with flowers in spring and summer, and in autumn and winter there were the scarlet berries of the mountain ash and the deeper red of the holly.

But summer or winter, spring or autumn, whichever it

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happened to be, nothing gave me—Raymond Keith—half as much pleasure as to hurry through the narrow streets of the village, and make my way to the top of the coal pit, and try and peep down it as far as ever I could.

But at last, as you may suppose, I grew tired of only peeping, and wanted to go down into the mine, and take just one look around.

"Please, father, take me down the pit, if only for ten minutes," I begged every day.

And my father as regularly replied, "By and bye, Raymond, my boy; by and bye. I have a reason for not taking you just at present. Try to be patient, there's a good little lad."

And I tried to be patient, as he bade me, but with very little success, for by and bye seemed such a dreadfully long time coming.

At last my desire was gratified, but at what a cost!

It was a clear and beautiful morning in early spring, a morning which would have made you, had you been an exile, say, "O, to be in England now—'tis April there." And, child as I was, I enjoyed it, for it was my birthday morning.

My father had gone into Durham on business, my mother was occupied with her household duties, and my sister Dora was playing with her doll in the nursery. I had nothing at all to do for an hour or two—why not walk into

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the town? So I put on my cap and stole softly out of the back door.

Scarcely thinking where I went, I strolled up High Street, and along the Durham Road, until, almost before I knew it, I was standing at the mouth of the Charity Pit.

"Oh! what a grand thing it would be to go down for an hour," I said to myself. "I would only give one little peep around, and I would tell father all about it, and I'm sure he wouldn't be vexed with me long."

But I knew as I mentally uttered these words that my wishes were all in vain, for I was quite aware that it was against the rules for anyone not employed at the mine to be taken down. Presently I saw the cage come up again, and in it was one of the overmen, named Matthew Pryor, a very old friend of mine, whom we had brought with us from Warwickshire.

"Oh, Matthew," I cried, "can't you take me down? It's my birthday, and father's away, and I haven't had any treat, and that would be such a great treat, you know."

"Well, little master, I've done my work for to-day, but as you seem so eager about it, why, I'll just take you down and let you see what they're doing there. Now, come, quick's the word," said he, as he helped me into the cage, and in less than a minute I had left the sunlight behind me, and was going down, down into the very interior of the earth.

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"Little master," as my good-natured guide called me, felt very sick and giddy, but, of course, he was too manly to own to such a childish feeling.

"Well, here we are," said the overman, as the cage touched the bottom; and he helped me out, and told me to rest a bit on a bench, and get my pit eyes, as the colliers call getting used to the darkness.

What a strange, dim, mysterious world that underground coal world was—a world where the feeble glimmer of our lamps only served to make the darkness visible; a world in which a strange fungus, like puff-balls, hung down from the walls and roof; a world in which the workers looked like gigantic shadows working at shadowy seams of coal with gigantic shadowy picks; a world in which colourless spiders wove transparent webs amidst perpetual gloom; a world in which the ponies were stabled in stalls cut out of the solid coal, and it seemed proper to creep on your hands and knees.

I grew tired at last of admiring the underground mushrooms, of watching the miners at work, and feebly trying to help them myself by the aid of a pick, which I could do little more than lift, and thought I should not be sorry when the time came for me to go up again to the green fields and fresh pure air above, when I was startled by seeing several mice run past me.

"Why, Matthew," I said to my guide, who stood near

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me, "who ever heard of mice in a coal mine, and cats, too?" (for three or four of these animals were running about, seemingly quite at home).

"How ever did they come here? This is queer."

"Of course it's queer, little master," said he. "If it wasn't, it wouldn't belong to downstairs, as we call our pit. As for the mice, why, they come down with the hay; and as for the pussies, as my little ones call them, why, we bring them down after the mice, and we pay them good wages, too, for we give them plenty of milk, or their fare would be a little too mousy. Everything's odd down here, you know! Just look at that tree in the coal, why, you can see all the branches, and the marks on the trunk, as plainly as you can those above ground; only, you see, the trees above are green, whilst the trees below are black, and that makes all the difference."

Yes, it did, most certainly, make all the difference—a whole wide world of difference—the difference between fresh, green, living beauty—the beauty of life—and the cold, still beauty of death; and even as I thought that the world above—the world upstairs—was best, our lamps went suddenly out; there was a far-off rumbling sound, something which resembled distant thunder, or the passing of a heavily-laden train over an iron railway bridge. My companion, who was standing alone with me in a small side passage, or tunnel, caught me by the hand, and exclaiming,

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"God help us both, the gallery's falling in!" drew me beside him, face downwards, on the ground. In my terror I lost hold of Matthew's hand, and cowered closer to the cold earth; and when at last I ventured to lift my head, I found that we were in total darkness.

Darkness which might be felt, which enveloped me like a thick black veil—darkness to which the night in the world above was brightness and light!

I roused myself, and felt around me, for I was dazed, but quite unhurt, and groped about until I once more felt Matthew's large, rough hand, so hard with toil, so warm and comforting in its strong and friendly grasp.

"Are you hurt, little master?" he whispered. "Don't 'ee be frit (frightened). Come now, 'tis only a little accident; the lads will soon set us free, but I misdoubt myself about you. I don't think I ought to have brought you down in the cage, only you seemed mighty eager to come, and I thort you'd bin down afore. Cheer up, though it is unked (lonesome), it will soon be over, you'll soon be in the light again. Thank God, we're both of us safe and sound. What! Crying, little man?"

(For I *was* weeping, weeping bitterly, and my tears must have fallen on Matthew's hand.)

"Nay, nay, never cry! Come, now!" and as he spoke he threw his arm around me in the darkness, and drew

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me to him as tenderly as my own dear father would have done.

"Oh, you do not know," I said, "you good, kind Matthew; you can't even guess, how very, very wrong I've been, for father does not know that I have come, and he will be so anxious about me, he will be home by this time, and will be searching for me on my birthday."

"Ay! he'll search for you; he'll grieve for you; and when he's found you he'll forgive you, and rejoice over finding you, like a man who's lit on a treasure. Surely, I know how he'll feel! I'm a father myself. Isn't my own little Nettie waiting for me at home, whilst I'm sitting here in the darkness? Yes, I know she's waiting for 'daddy!'" and as he uttered these last words the kind, pathetic voice had a break in it, the arm around my shoulders trembled, and, child as I was, I guessed the reason why; I knew that, for all his courage, the honest fellow's heart almost failed him at the thought of home, and the dear ones there; and I folded my hands in the darkness and prayed, fervently,

"Oh, dear Father in Heaven, 'Let there be light!'"

Oh, how long the time seemed, sitting there in the darkness, and not knowing whether I should ever see my dear father and mother again. Matthew comforted me with every kind and cheering word he could think of.

"Never fear—they'll not let us be here a moment longer

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than they can help, and they'll work with a will, ay, every man amongst them," added Matthew, with a stronger pressure of my hand, and a confident ring in his voice, which gave me hope in spite of all my fears.

All of a sudden Matthew made a quick movement. "Hark," he said, in a low but thrilling tone, "did ye hear that? Listen — there it is again — they're clearing away the stuff—they'll soon reach us. Thank God and take courage, little master, it'll not be long now."

No tongue can tell the relief those words gave me, but I was overcome with fasting and terror and anxiety, and indeed I believe that I fainted, for when I came to myself I was lying in my own little bed at home; beside me sat my father and mother with grave and anxious faces, and, spread out on the counterpane, were a new bat and ball, an illustrated story-book, and a box of French plums. These were some of my birthday presents, and my sister Dora, who was perched on the edge of the bed, was gravely presiding over, and guarding them.

"Father, just say you forgive me," I whispered.

"Believe that father forgives and loves his little Raymond, and will trust to his honour in future," he replied, as he smoothed back the hair from my brow.

"Believe that we love you," said mother, as she bent down and kissed me.

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"Just try and get well again, to play with *me*, Raymond," said Dora. "Why all these things *ought* to cure you, they would me; look at the plums!" and she opened the box of candied fruit. "This is my present, which I bought you because it was sweet!" and she laid her face on my pillow and smiled till I smiled in response, and forgot all the terrors of my Birthday in a Coal Mine!

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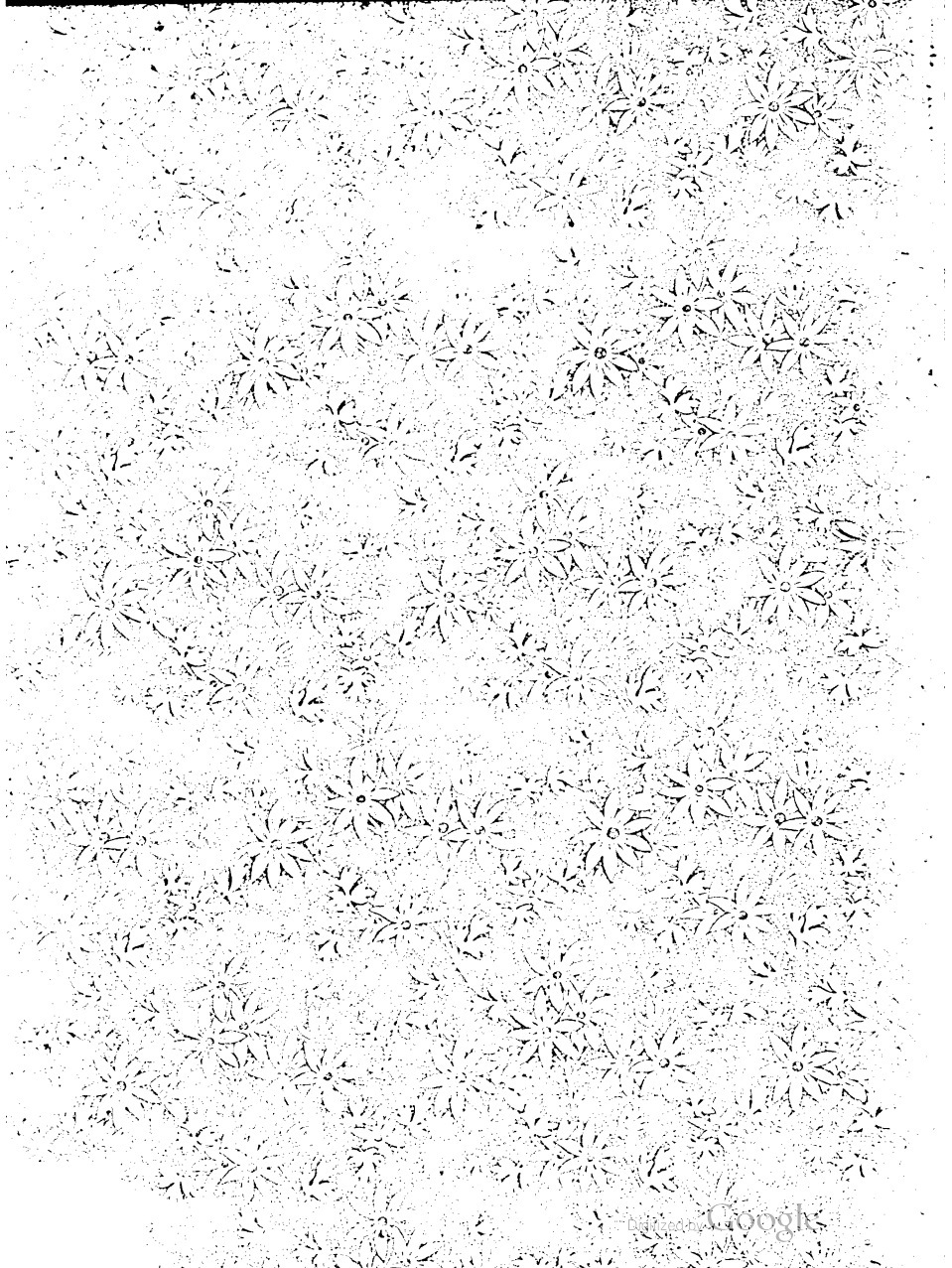
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